

Of Arrows and Paperwork

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Of Arrows and Paperwork

by [AndInThoseMoments](#)

Summary

Clint's been hiding his feelings for a long time, but after he nearly loses Coulson, he realises just how much he means to him. Coulson, waking up in a hospital bed to find Clint sat beside him, begins to realise that maybe he wasn't as alone in his feelings as he thought.

Thirty linked one-shots over the month of April for a version of the 30day OTP challenge.

Notes

This is being written for a slightly altered version of the 30 day OTP challenge and so will hopefully update pretty fast. Each chapter will have its own warnings.

General warnings for fic: mentions of past violence and abuse (including childhood abuse), canon-typical violence, a lot of angst, references to prostitution, off stage/implied non-con prior to the fic (not involving any of the pairings in the fic)

Warnings for this chapter: Mentions of violence, self-hatred, past abuse and past Loki.

Chapter 1: Holding Hands

"You can see him." There was resignation on Fury's face, a calm quiet control that in the past might have frightened Clint, back when he was still intimidated by the man. Right now, he felt nothing other than anger, burning red hot in his chest.

The anger was good. The anger cleaned, the anger helped. The anger kept away the knowledge of the last few weeks, stopped it from tearing him apart inside. It filled him, kept the memory of Loki's sneering face, those dark blue eyes, those cold words and commands that he would have done anything to obey.

It took away the memories of giving orders, of shooting, of killing men and women that had been his friends. It soothed the agony of Natasha's voice, painfully gentle, as he woke in a cell.

"Coulson is..." She had shrugged, and Clint had nearly thrown up there and then. "Fury called it. But there's always hope." Clint knew what had gone unsaid there. That she didn't trust the bastard. He didn't either, but he'd gone into battle not knowing if he'd hear his handler's voice again, whether he had lost the man who had raised him from nothing.

The anger had got him through psych eval after psych eval in the past two days, some even before he'd been allowed to go to medical, to have shards of glass ripped from his skin. It had helped him to carry on breathing as he relived the worst moments of the past few weeks, as they accused him of being a traitor, of not fighting hard enough, of not resisting.

It had even helped him handle the sympathetic smiles of his team mates in the aftermath, helped him block out Tony's crude insinuations and Steve's hesitant hand on his shoulder as he had spoken with the kindness of a leader.

"I'm sorry about Agent Coulson. Stark told me you were... close..." There had been awkwardness, and pity, and things he had not needed, and he had been furious. But he had made it through the tests, and had been released into Natasha's care.

She was beside him now, as Fury gave him the one thing he had been waiting for, the only thing he cared about. He didn't mind about his life any more, didn't want to be any more with the memories of what had happened twisting through his gut, hatred of the world tangling with hatred of himself. Every time he looked at his closest friend, every time she smiled at him, he remembered resting against Loki's side, his lips spilling every secret she had told him, every moment they had known to keep between them. He didn't deserve her.

She took his hand, led him away from Fury and gazed into his eyes.

"You stop those thoughts Barton. It wasn't your fault, and you fought as hard as any of them. You didn't kill Fury or Hill when you had the chance."

"I let..."

She raised her hand and slapped him.

"Barton. You do not act like what happens when you are ...under control... is your fault. You

know things Barton, and you know that if you blame yourself, you are blaming me for worse. Now, stop drowning in self pity. You have someone to see."

Clint nodded, managing a faint smile as the waves of anger and self-hatred receded slightly. He had needed that.

"You'll..." He started to ask, but fell quiet, not knowing what to say.

"I'll wait at the door." She answered with a nod, and led him to the room. She pushed open the door, and then held back.

Clint walked in, trying not to look at the rows of beeping machines, or breathe in the sterile taste of the air. He had always hated medical, but this was worse. This wasn't him waking up, or seeing Natasha bruised and battered in the sheets. This was Coulson, who was not meant to get hurt, who was meant to be out of danger.

Clint had put him there, and he didn't know if he could ever forgive himself for it.

The few steps across the room seemed to take an eternity, before he sat down in the chair, and stared at the man on the bed. Coulson was pale, his skin tinged with grey and his eyes closed. There were bags running into and out of him, and his hands lay limp at his sides. His chest rose and fell slowly, and the machines beat out the rhythm of his heart. Bandages were swathed around his chest, and Clint felt sick.

It took a few moments of watching for him to realise the anger was gone. The hatred had left him, and all he had was Coulson's presence by his side, the sight of the man he had betrayed, who he thought was lost.

He reached out, wrapping both of his hands around one of his handler's, ready to drop it if he gave any sign of distress, but none came. So he squeezed it gently.

"It's okay sir." He spoke roughly, and his voice shook. But the only one who could hear was Natasha, and he knew her well enough to know that she wouldn't say. She would never tell.

"It's okay sir. They're going to look after you. And... you got me back. You got your dumb sniper back. I fucked up sir, real bad, but I'm home now. The hawk's back in his nest, huh, you remember that? Sure you do, you hate how I fuck around on comms. You never tell me to shut up though..."

Clint swallowed, his tongue feeling too big for his mouth, and was surprised to find his face was damp. He closed his eyes, trying to keep talking.

"You love listening to me rant really. You must, you'd have walked out long ago otherwise. Everyone else always did. Everyone other than you and Tasha. You two are special..." A soft sound escaped him as he tried to carry on, wondering if Phil could even hear it.

"You always were sir. I didn't know how to say it before, and now I don't know if I'll ever get the chance. But you weren't just a handler to me. You were a friend...and I... I..." Words failed him, and he felt Natasha pull him close. He turned, burying his face in her shoulder, and let her rub his back until he ran out of tears.

Chapter 2: Providing Support

Chapter Summary

Coulson wakes up to the beeping of machines and the sound of Clint's voice.

Chapter Notes

Warnings: None for this chapter, just recovering from injury.
Written for the prompt "cuddling" from the list.

The trips to the bedside became a regular occurrence. They were what got Clint through the tests, and through the missions that he began to qualify for. It was rookie stuff, he could have done it in his sleep, but it was a sign he was beginning to be allowed back in, that SHIELD wasn't going to throw him back out on the street.

So he would sit by Coulson's bed, and hold his hand, and look into his eyes and talk to him. He would tell him about what had happened, let him know how Sitwell had reacted over comms, and laugh and joke, and try and act like everything was normal.

For two months, he visited for an hour every day, like clockwork, to sit with the sound of his voice and the beep of machines. He wasn't always alone - Natasha was his most frequent companion, but as he began to settle in with the rest of the team, they'd visit sometimes as well.

He doubted Coulson could hear him, but he had to try something.

It was nearly autumn when he walked in and realised Coulson was looking at him. At him, not past him or through him the way he had been doing, not just an empty stare with no thought behind it. His eyes were focussed, and while he was still pale, the grey tinge was gone.

Clint's breath shook as he resumed his normal perch, sat up on the chair, watching him intently, with those calm blue eyes staring back. After months of talking, he found himself without anything to say.

He licked his lips, swallowed dryly, and spoke, voice wavering more than he would have liked.

"It's about time you showed up sir."

There was a slight nod, the smallest crease of amusement on Coulson's lips, and no more. The eyes unfocussed, and then closed, and Clint knew that that movement had somehow tired out the strongest man he knew. But he could tell now that there was hope.

After that, he tried to visit constantly. He'd break up the hour long sessions into fifteen minute segments, sneak in when he had a break, or even when he was meant to be on the range. He'd sit there, and talk, and watch as Coulson grew stronger, watch him transform back into the man he had been before. He still laced his fingers with Coulson's.

The day Coulson's hand had squeezed his own slightly, he had been unable to stop smiling, even when Fury had shouted at him for not paying attention to a briefing. He was getting his handler back.

For Coulson, the days passed by in a blur of treatments and exhaustion, with sudden stabs of pain piercing through with increasing frequency. Muscles ached, and as he became more aware of his surroundings, his own weakness infuriated him. He couldn't move at all, was totally dependent on his carers, and he hated it.

He began to understand Clint's deep dislike of medical. Once he was out of here, he would be happy if he never saw so much as a bandaid again. But sometimes he would hear a voice, and it was Clint's voice, and that was good.

As he got stronger, to the point where he could open his eyes, he would catch glimpses before the world swam out of focus once more, and sometimes he saw Clint. Eventually he was able to make out words. Then Clint was there more, and the words were just him talking but it was good. The drugs were making his thoughts swim and Clint was there and Clint's hand was holding his own.

Clint's hand was warm.

Days meant nothing in that room. As he improved, he was able to sit up, to listen as others read to him, then to read himself. Once he could hold a pen, he tried to fill in forms, but the world was still dancing and he kept losing his place. The physiotherapist said that he was making progress.

Sitting up was progress, and so was signing his name without the pen shaking. Standing was progress, but it exhausted him so much he slept the next two days. Time ticked on, and Clint was there. Coulson liked that.

Five months after the battle, and New York was getting rebuilt. Coulson could walk the length of the room, and the pain that lanced through his chest winded him now, but no longer made him crumple to the ground.

He was sick of the same walls. Clint strolled in one day, and the grin on his face was wider than it had been for a long time.

"They said you can come home with me. With the team." He informed Coulson. "Tony's set up rooms, we're having a nurse visit daily, and me and Natasha are going to help. Bruce is a doctor, close enough. So..." He shrugged. "Cap's waiting outside with a wheelchair. Come on. Home."

Coulson nodded, shuffling to the edge of the bed and bracing himself there. Clint slipped in beside him, moving Coulson's arm over his shoulder, and placing an arm around his waist, a movement they'd perfected on the long path to recovery. Coulson let his agent support him, and slowly they made their way to the door, to the waiting crowd.

Coulson let himself slip away at the noise of the team, nodding in answers to their questions but overwhelmed. He sunk into the chair, and relaxed.

He woke again once they reached the tower, to hear JARVIS greeting him.

"Agent Coulson, it's a pleasure to have you here once more."

"You too JARVIS." He answered, and let Steve guide him to the elevator.

Clint supported Coulson's weight, and when the doors opened, he got his first glimpse of his new rooms. They were larger than his old apartment, far larger, and there was tech visible, along with filing cabinets. He had an office by the entrance, and Clint was talking to him but he couldn't focus on what was being said. He just nodded and followed him through into the bedroom.

"You've got a bathroom just through there sir." Clint told him, waving with one hand. That was when Coulson noticed that there was a camp bed set up next to his double.

"Is that for the nurse?" He asked curiously, feeling a little uneasy at the thought of a stranger watching him sleep.

"No. It's. Um. It's for me." Clint stuttered out. "Thought you might need help, I know walking's still kind of hard and I'm not cruel enough to leave you with no way of getting to the bathroom so..." He trailed off, glancing up with hesitance shining in his eyes.

Coulson nodded once, granting permission, and then reaching out to ruffle his agent's hair.

"I couldn't cope without you Clint."

There was silence for a moment, and a look close to shock passed over Clint's face, before he spoke.

"I couldn't cope without you either sir."

Chapter 3: The Competition

Chapter Summary

As Coulson settles in to life at the tower, Clint tries to come to terms with what happened, and with the presence of the rest of the team.

Chapter Notes

Thank you to shadowhaloedangel for patiently betaing this!

Clint had known that not everything was going to be back to normal now that they were living in the tower but he had hoped for more than this. Coulson's path back to health after being stabbed through the chest was slow and painful for them both, and whilst Clint was used to living in SHIELD rooms surrounded by people, he wasn't used to what he had here.

There was constant noise, and games, and friendship. Steve, being Steve and ridiculously sentimental at points, described it as being a family. Clint wasn't sure about that. He'd never had a family, and he had no intention of starting now.

But he watched as Coulson recovered and he began to be part of the team even if he wasn't yet belonging to it. He slept on the camp bed nearby, and helped his handler if he needed him, and he found something close to redemption. He knew it would be impossible for him to ever repair the damage that had been done. He would never resurrect the lives that had been lost when the Helicarrier was hit, or those who had died in the battle; he could not bite back the words Loki had teased forth from his unwilling mouth; but he could help Coulson recover. It wasn't much, but it was something.

That was what he told himself. It was a thought he repeated regularly, trying to make himself believe it. There were times when the illusion held, and he felt like he had been given the chance to be saved.

Yet as Coulson recovered, the feelings Clint had first recognised as he lay in a hospital bed didn't disappear. If anything they made themselves known more loudly and insistently than before. Clint felt trapped, and Clint hated feeling trapped.

He knew that Coulson had rules, that SHIELD had rules about these kind of things, and he didn't want to get caught in them. Generally these were ignored, or viewed as guidance, but Coulson was his direct superior and Coulson stuck to rules. It was all just a game anyway, thoughts like that. He knew Coulson would never be interested in him.

Any chance he might have had was eliminated by the people he had chosen to live with, the home he had brought Coulson into. He had moved his handler into a house with the man's childhood hero.

Clint had been to Coulson's apartment before, and his office. He was never very good at staying out of places, and Coulson had always felt safe. Clint had had very few places in his life that felt safe. When he had found one, he had no intention of letting it go. So he had been, and he had stood in the doorway and seen posters and shelves full of memorabilia about Captain America.

That was before Steve was pulled from the ice. Now, he helped Coulson down to breakfast, and sat him down, and went to cook for them both. He saw Steve walk in, his body reflected in the pan he was using to fry breakfast, and he tensed.

The reflection of Steve sat next to the reflection of Coulson, and they spoke in quiet whispers, laughing together. Clint's blood boiled, but he kept quiet, watching, but trying not to hear. At times they'd glance over towards him, and he would pretend not to see it.

He was so focussed on that pretence that he almost jumped when Tony appeared behind him, one hand stroking his hip. "You got enough for me to get some too Legolas?" "What?" Clint asked, annoyed and unfocussed and trying to move out of Tony's range. "Breakfast. You got enough for me and Capsicle?"

Clint wanted to yell, to throw the pan and tell Stark to make his own damn breakfast. But this was Tony's house, and it wasn't Tony's fault that Coulson preferred Steve to Clint. Hell, Clint preferred Steve to Clint. It wasn't anyone's fault.

"Yeh." He added the extra ingredients, and tried not to tense when Tony patted his ass before walking away.

"Tony." Steve's voice was serious, and Clint rolled his eyes. Steve took everything so seriously. He supposed that would work well for him and Coulson. Steve would always do his paperwork on time.

"What Capsicle?"

"Leave Clint alone." There was something in Steve's voice that Clint couldn't quite place. He turned to look, grinning lazily at them.

"Thanks Cap."

"It's nothing Clint." Steve answered, all sincerity and smiles and Clint knew what that note to his voice was. It was possessiveness. Steve liked Tony.

The relief that flooded through his body at that moment nearly knocked him off of his feet. Steve wasn't after Coulson. Coulson might pine after him rather than have Clint, but he wouldn't have to watch his teammate and handler shack up.

That thought made him feel almost guilty, and he put down the plates on the table carefully, to grateful smiles from Coulson and Steve, and a smirk from Tony.

The day passed agonisingly slowly from Clint's perspective. He helped Coulson to the gym, and ran through a workout while the older man completed his physio, and then walked with him to his office.

He settled him down with his paperwork, and went to leave, only to be stopped by Coulson's hand on his wrist.

"Barton, we still need to go over what happened prior to the battle."

"I told psych." Clint spat the words, shuddering.

"I know you did. But I want to hear it from you, not their reports. I want to understand, can you let me have that?"

Clint sighed. He would never manage to say no to him.

"I was guarding the tesseract. Loki appeared, poked me in the chest with his mind-slave stick, and took me. Kept me. Made me tell him everything, made me do what he wanted. He enjoyed it, found it..." Clint's voice caught a little, and he was shaking. "Found it fun. To hurt me. I couldn't fight."

The hand on his wrist was rubbing soothing circles on his skin, and Clint felt some of the anger and tension fall away from him. Not all of it, but enough to carry on.

"It continued until Natasha managed to knock some sense into me. Since then I haven't.... I haven't been affected at all."

Coulson didn't look overly convinced, so Clint shrugged half-heartedly.

"Okay. Maybe a few nightmares and memories, but I know that's what they are. I'm alright. I'm managing. They cleared me for missions."

Coulson nodded once, and Clint hoped that was it. When Coulson told him he could go, with a soft squeeze of his hand and a kind "It wasn't your fault Clint", he headed straight to the range. He needed to try and clear his head.

The rest of the day was a blur, until he laid down on the camp bed, body aching and mentally exhausted. Beside him, he could already hear Coulson's steady breathing. He lay there, staring at the ceiling and trying to fight sleep away, trying to hold the nightmares back for as long as he could.

Chapter 4: Unsure if unrequited

Chapter Summary

Coulson wants to do the responsible thing. It just isn't always clear what the responsible thing is.

Chapter Notes

Thanks again to Shadowhaloedangel for betaing, and thanks to everyone who has read, commented, subscribed and left kudos!

Making his way up the steps in front of SHIELD headquarters never used to take this long. It used to be something he didn't even think about. But thanks to Loki, to what the god had done, it took effort. Coulson doubted he could have managed if it wasn't for Agent Barton at his side, a hand resting on his hip as he helped him up the steps and to Fury's office.

Clint's body was warm against him, and Coulson tried to ignore it. He was meant to be a professional. He was in a position of authority over Barton and that had always been enough to limit his actions before. Then he had lost Barton to Loki and had thought he would never see him again. That was when he had made the mistake of recognising the feelings he actually had for the younger man. Allowing himself to name them.

It had been far too easy for him to admit that his feelings for the lost agent went beyond fondness, or even friendship, and that they had crossed those barriers a long time ago. He had almost come to peace with that knowledge, accepted what it was that he had truly lost, and allowed himself to give words to what he felt.

Then Barton had come back, sat by his bedside, and those words had become a problem. Barton had been betrayed repeatedly by authority figures in the past and Coulson was determined not to add his name to that list of sinners. He tried to distance himself from Barton, to learn the rest of the team, but Clint had been so helpful, so considerate, that it was a hard distance to maintain.

Now, every night, he lay a few feet from the man he cared about, the man who had saved his life and been saved in turn dozens of times, and was powerless to stop the quiet whimpers that Barton didn't seem to realise escaped him in sleep. He couldn't keep the bad dreams away.

What he could do though, for Barton's sake if not his own, was make sure that he didn't end up in a position where he could betray Barton's trust. That was what he knew he had to do.

Clint knocked on the door for him, and when Fury called them in Clint left him alone, allowing Coulson to do something to try and preserve his dignity as he hobbled into the room, movements slow. He made sure to keep breathing, even when the pain drew a hiss from him, and he sat down opposite the director who was one of his oldest friends.

"Agent Coulson." Fury acknowledged with a slight tilt of his head. "It's good to have you back. You've been missed."

"Thank you sir. Always knew SHIELD would fall apart without me." He spoke softly, because speaking loudly hurt, but Fury nodded all the same.

"Oh, you just wait until you see the pile of paperwork that's build up for you while you were having a nice holiday. That'll teach you to get yourself stabbed."

"I can assure you sir..." Coulson answered after a moment. "It wasn't deliberate."

"That's what they all say."

"What sir, all the people that have been stabbed through the lung?"

"What did you want to see me about Agent?" Fury asked, and there was genuine curiosity there. For a moment, Coulson considered lying, but he reminded himself of how vulnerable Clint had been last night when the nightmares had hit, of missions where he had held Clint's shattered body together with his bare hands. Clint deserved him to tell the truth.

"I came to request another handler for Agent Barton."

Fury's one eyebrow raised a little, and he looked Coulson straight in the eye.

"Have you now? Why do you think Agent Barton needs a new handler? If this is because of the incident...well, Agent, I thought you would probably understand, and if this is because of your injuries, we can always postpone your return..." There was a toughness to Fury's voice, a calmness that intimidated the younger agents. Right now, it was doing a fairly good job of intimidating Coulson.

"No. I think he needs a new handler because I am struggling to maintain a professional distance. I still want to be involved, I still want to work with him, I just feel that this is something I can do better if I'm not constantly breathing down his neck."

"You are a fucking idiot sometimes Phil." Fury responded, and just like that he flipped from being the Director of SHIELD to Coulson's oldest friend. "You know damn well he'd see that as a betrayal. Hell, it'd probably be the biggest betrayal of his life."

"I'm trying to take care of him." Coulson tried to argue. "This isn't easy on me Nick, but I have to do what's right for Clint."

"Then do what's right for Clint. Don't just abandon him because you're having emotional problems. You've both been fucking pining for each other for years now, and yeh maybe it's got worse but it never stopped you working with him before. I'm not going to assign him a new handler."

Coulson's face was carefully blank, as he fought to make sense of the information that had been supplied to him. The thought that Clint liked him too seemed laughable, but he couldn't bring himself to smile at the thought.

"What I am going to do, Agent, is tell you to take charge of that whole damn team. They

listen to you, they like you, and they're going to be enough trouble to teach you not to get yourself killed again. You hear me?"

"Yes sir..." Coulson nodded, face still calm.

"Good. Then Agent, you hear this as well. You go and sort out that mountain of paperwork, and you go to therapy and medical and whatever the fuck else it is that you're meant to do today. Then you go to Agent Barton and you man up and you fucking tell him what you told me, or I am going to have you demoted so fast you'll wish Loki had killed you."

"Sir..."

"I will have you demoted to Mister Stark's permanent babysitter, do you understand me?"

Coulson nodded, and closed his eyes.

"Yes sir."

"Get out of my sight. And Phil...good luck."

Coulson struggled uneasily to his feet, making his way to the door.

"Thanks sir. I get the feeling I'm gonna need it."

Chapter 5: Discussion and dates

Chapter Summary

Clint waits to find out what the meeting was about. When Coulson returns, he asks something Clint wasn't expecting.

Chapter Notes

Thank you to Shadowhaloedangel for betaing, and for all of you for reading!
For the prompt: First date

Clint was sat in the corner of Coulson's office, tucked up safely with his back against a wall. He normally would have rested on the sofa, but since Loki he had felt safer with something solid behind him. His paperwork was spread out on the floor in front of him and he read it over carefully, waiting for Coulson to return.

He didn't know what the meeting with Fury had been about, but based on how anxious his handler had been beforehand it had to be something important.

Coulson pushed open the door, but rather than going to his desk he sat down on the black sofa, leaving the spot up in the corner for Clint. He signalled for him to sit down. With shaking legs Clint got up and made his way over, his mind racing with different possibilities. He didn't know if this was him getting kicked off of the team. He hadn't done anything wrong that he knew of, but it was a group of the elite and he wasn't sure he was good enough.

He looked at Coulson's eyes, trying to judge how he felt. The older man was clearly nervous but not angry or irritated, which meant it was hard to judge what could have been wrong. Clint was fairly sure Coulson would have been angry if Clint had been kicked off the team so that was something. He sat down beside him.

Coulson spoke calmly and evenly, and the only hint of any possible concern was a flicker in his eyes that was normally perfectly suppressed.

"Agent Barton, I want to start by letting you know that if you want, we can forget about this conversation. Equally, you would be fully entitled to ask for a new handler, and I will try and ensure that you get the best. I will not do anything without your permission, and I do not in any way want you to feel forced or trapped, do you understand?"

Clint nodded, even though he was pretty sure he'd understand a lot better if he knew what it was that was being asked.

"Good. Well...Clint, I was wondering if you'd like to go out for a meal tonight, just the two of us."

"As a date?" Clint whispered, as things started to slide into place. He knew it couldn't be that, that it didn't make sense, but it was the only way he could find to make all the puzzle pieces line up.

"As a date. If you want to. If not we can continue as before, or you can get a new-"

"I want to." Clint answered, almost too quickly, then raised his hand as he backtracked. "If it doesn't work out I won't get kicked..."

"No. Clint, you deserve your place in this team. This isn't about you keeping it, or any idea that you might owe me anything. It's about the fact I like you, that I want to spend time with you, and that I think you might like me in return. If not, I respect that."

Clint tried to process what was being said. Eventually, a few of the words fell into place, and he nodded.

"Yeh. I'd like to go for a meal."

"Alright. I'll see you after work?"

Clint nodded, embraced Coulson and headed to the range, to shoot until he was able to clear his mind.

That evening, he went to collect Coulson from his office. Clint was wearing a fairly smart pair of jeans and a tshirt, as formal as he felt comfortable with. He wanted this, he did. He'd talked to Natasha earlier, and she had seemed pleased for him, and he had wanted this for so long that he could scarcely believe it was happening. None of that changed the fact that he was actually terrified. He'd rather face HYDRA goons than this any day of the week. This was his chance, and he had to make sure he didn't mess it up.

Coulson smiled when he left his office, and directed Clint to an amazing restaurant nearby. It wasn't so formal that Clint felt under dressed, but it was still a nice place. Some parts of Clint's past lingered in his mind, reminding him that he didn't belong in nice places. But he smiled and tried to remember how to breathe.

He had to do this well. He'd eaten with Coulson before hundreds of times; shared sandwiches on rooftops, fancy meals, on the road, even times when they'd made a meal together. But it had never been like this. He was so tense it hurt, and Coulson kept asking if he was alright, kept reminding him he didn't have to be here no matter how often Clint said he wanted to be.

When the meal was over he felt himself going almost limp with relief, and Coulson's hand reached for his, letting Clint guide him back to the car.

"Sorry..." Coulson spoke with surprising tenderness. "I guess that was a bit stressful for you, I should have thought."

"It's fine. It was a good idea." Clint insisted, because the last thing he wanted was for Coulson to think that he hadn't wanted to go, or that he would rather not go on another date.

"It's alright Clint. You can say if you didn't like it."

"I wanted to go out with you."

"Then we can. We'll just find things you like, okay? And you can say if you think something's a bad idea."

Clint nodded, reaching to squeeze Coulson's hand gently, reminding himself of that.

"Look..." Coulson began again, and there was a smile on his face. "How about we head back to my place and watch a movie? We can cuddle up on the sofa, and then after we can head back to the tower okay, does that sound like a better option?"

Clint nodded, hesitating then signalling towards Coulson's apartment. He liked that place. He'd slept on the sofa, or in the bed, or on the floor, hundreds of times. It felt like home. He parked, helped Coulson inside, and they settled down to watch the film, curled up against each other.

Chapter 6: Making Out

Chapter Summary

Clint and Coulson cuddle up on the sofa and enjoy each others' company.

The change that came over Clint once they were inside Coulson's apartment was instantaneous. He was more relaxed, more at ease than he had been throughout the meal, and Coulson wished he hadn't made him endure it. He should have thought, should have realised that for Clint normal things, dates and friendships and things everybody else took for granted, were almost impossibly difficult.

This Clint knew though. This was the sofa they had talked on, watched films on. This was where Clint had lain for two weeks once, having broken seven different bones and contracted a fainting sickness yet still insistent as ever that he didn't need medical. Coulson had made him get patched up but after that he had just let Clint rest at his apartment. It was easier than trying to handle a sulking archer.

Clint sat on the sofa and was relaxed, his entire posture different from how tense he had been previously in Coulson's office. There was no sign now of the man that Loki had taken and turned, no sign of the guilt that had become constant in Clint's eyes. There was simple joy.

Coulson sat beside him on the sofa, turning on the television and sending Clint to get up and pick the film. As Indiana Jones blared to life on the screen, he wrapped an arm around the younger man's shoulders only to get shoved in the side by the archer.

"I picked the film, you go make popcorn."

"Clint..." Coulson protested half-heartedly, but the agent merely shrugged smugly and muted the film, sticking out his tongue.

Coulson rolled his eyes but got up to make the popcorn, returning with a bowl of it. He sat down beside Clint once more and handed it over, amused by how Clint wrapped himself around the bowl, eating the food, shoving a handful of it into his mouth. Only once he had got some did he hold it out to Coulson, his jaw working through what he was already eating. "You look like a hamster Clint." Coulson informed him calmly. Clint shrugged, unable to stick his tongue out, and carried on chewing, already searching the bowl for the best pieces of popcorn. He picked out the yellow ones, dusted thick with flavouring, and popped them into his mouth when he'd finally managed to swallow the first.

Coulson helped him, picking out the pieces with most flavour and letting Clint gorge himself as the film rolled on. It was there more for background noise than anything, a reassuring reminder of previous times they had been here. Coulson's arm crept back around Clint's shoulder, and this time Clint didn't shrug it away. Instead, he nuzzled closer, trying to hide against him.

"You real?" He asked softly.

"Yes..." Coulson leant forwards, brushing his lips against Clint's forehead with surprising tenderness. "You know I'm real Clint. I'm real and I'm not leaving you."

"For so long I thought..."

"I know Clint. I know. I don't approve of what Fury did, I understand why he did it but I don't like it. I'm here now. And I'm not going anywhere."

Clint nodded, his brilliant gaze meeting Coulson's with such intensity it almost stung. In those eyes Coulson could see reflected fear, and pain, and betrayal. Most of all though, he could see hope shining there, so fragile that he was afraid that it would shatter if he made even the smallest of mistakes.

"I'm not going anywhere Clint."

Clint nodded, and leaned in closer, his eyes fluttering closed. First, Coulson brushed his lips over Clint's cheek, to give him a moment to pull away if he wanted to, or to say that he didn't want this. When the only reaction was a soft gasp of pleasure he moved along to brush his lips over Clint's own.

Their first kiss was chaste and gentle, as Coulson tried to show Clint how precious he was. It was tentative, and careful, and they were both testing what was alright, knowing there could be problems but still trying to find what would work. Clint tasted of himself, a taste that Coulson would remember, that was utterly incomparable to anything else. Well Clint tasted of himself and popcorn. But given his previous actions, Coulson hardly found that surprising.

They pulled away, a little short of breath and with Coulson only too aware of a faint band of pink across his cheek, looking at each other but smiling all the same.

"That good?" Clint asked, grinning softly.

"Yes." Coulson breathed. "That was amazing."

"Good." And now Clint's smile had become a smirk. "Let's try it again."

Their second kiss was everything the first wasn't. It was hot and needy and almost desperate, as they both tried to show each other how they felt. Clint's hands found Coulson's shoulders, pulling him close, sliding over his shirt to his buttons, moving away for a moment to look into his eyes before moving in once more, kissing at his neck.

Coulson panted, but shook his head, signalling for Clint to move away, which the agent did instantly, looking up to him as though he was afraid.

"I go too fast?"

"No..." Coulson smiled fondly, and even though the real answer was yes he wasn't going to say it. "I just can't deal with too much exertion right now Clint. I'm still recovering."

Clint laughed a little, and a smirk lingered on his lips which implied he was biting back more than a few choice comments. Coulson rolled his eyes, but his hand still found Clint's, still squeezed it gently to reassure him and let him know it was alright.

"When I'm better."

"That a promise sir?"

"Clint." Coulson frowned at him a little.

"Shit. Okay. Sorry. Uh... Coulson?" At a nod, Clint continued. "That a promise Coulson?"

"Yes. That's a promise."

"I'll hold you to it."

"Shut up Clint..." Coulson answered, leaning in to kiss him once more, a return of the earlier tenderness, his fingers stroking through Clint's hair as he held him close.

Chapter 7: Masquerade

Chapter Summary

Clint was used to everyone in SHIELD wearing masks, but it wasn't normally this literal. Tony, being Tony, had decided that it was necessary for them to all have a party, and he was insistent that he was the best at parties so had to organise it.

Clint was used to everyone in SHIELD wearing masks, but it wasn't normally this literal. Tony, being Tony, had decided that it was necessary for them to all have a party, and he was insistent that he was the best at parties so had to organise it.

Clint had heard all about Tony's parties before. When he had been on the streets, they had usually dominated the first few pages of the tabloid press, and Clint had always liked reading when he could. Once he was in SHIELD, and they had started to take an interest in Iron Man, he had read the official reports. But still, nothing prepared him for actually being at one. He lingered in the doorway, watching the crowd and trying to work out exactly how to make his entrance for most impact.

He'd come back to the tower with Phil late the previous night, only for Tony to throw the announcement at them that there was going to be a party, it was going to be tomorrow, and they were both going in fancy dress or they'd better get used to having cold showers. Since Tony had control of the water supply through Jarvis, they didn't doubt he could follow through on the threat.

The entire team was there, along with a few of Tony's friends - the ever-delightful and friendly Pepper, who Clint was rather fond of, and Colonel Rhodes who almost scared Clint. He didn't get on that well with military types. Coulson at least liked the Colonel, and he made Pepper happy, so Clint was determined to deal with it.

The choice of outfits was interesting as well. Tony, to the surprise of absolutely no one, had turned up in his armour, whilst Steve had pulled out a white t-shirt and combat trousers from somewhere. Clint hadn't missed the way Tony's eyes were following the soldier around the room - it seemed the outfit had met his approval. Bruce meanwhile was in a lab coat and claiming to be Einstein. He was dancing with Natasha, who had decided to wear a suit and top hat. That made Clint relax a little - at least they seemed to be enjoying themselves. It wasn't that he didn't trust Bruce, he knew the man had his anger issues under control, but he didn't want the party to be torture for him. And for Natasha, it was good to have an opportunity to go to a party without it being work-related.

Thor meanwhile had either understood this too well, or not well enough, as he was wandering around in jeans and a t-shirt. The god was loudly informing anyone who asked, along with

those who didn't, that he had decided to attend the event in the guise of a Midgarian. His explanation seemed to be met with at least a few smiles.

Clint's eyes scanned the room once more, settling on the form of Coulson. His handler was impeccably dressed in a smart suit and sunglasses. Tony walked up to him, and Clint focused on reading his lips.

"I told you to come in fancy dress Agent."

"I did." Coulson replied, and there was a moment's silence before Tony opened his mouth to object. "I came as Agent K."

Tony doubled over with laughter, and Clint took this as his cue to enter, grateful that Natasha had helped him find flat shoes. He winked at Steve, and the blond stuttered slightly, stepping closer to Tony. Clint just grinned, saluted and made his way to Coulson, his white gloved hand reaching out for the handler's own.

"Really Barton?"

"Really sir. I mean, I know you like Captain America, but I tried on his uniform and it doesn't fit me."

"So you decide to go as a USO girl Barton? Why was this a logical train of thought?" There was fondness in Coulson's voice, even if it was mixed with a great deal of exasperation.

"I'm a good looking USO girl, sir. Half the people in the room are staring."

"Half the people in the room are staring, Agent Barton, because you are wandering around in a low cut blue top and a red and white striped skirt. You are making an exhibition of yourself."

"Do you mind?" Clint asked, and his gaze flicked up to Coulson's eyes, uncertainty lingering there for a moment. He suddenly realised that he was probably embarrassing him, that Coulson was going to think better of it and leave him for someone who wouldn't show him up in public.

He closed his eyes, taking a deep steady breath. He could suddenly feel Loki's hand on his shoulder, squeezing it slightly. He jerked, looking at his shoulder and finding no one there, but he was staring now, waiting for something to happen, for Coulson to yell or hit or for Loki to take him.

"No..." Coulson stroked his shoulders gently. "It's okay Clint. It's okay. If you've decided to wear that, then wear it."

"Thought it'd be fun for you."

Coulson rolled his eyes but smiled.

"Something like that..."

"Good. You better appreciate it, this is fucking cold."

Coulson took a slow breath and leaned in to nuzzle his cheek.

"You're ridiculous sometimes Clint." He hesitated, and took off his jacket, wrapping it around Clint's waist and tying the sleeves. "That any better?"

"Yeh." Clint rested his hand on the jacket, liking the feeling of its weight against his hips. This was one of Coulson's suits, and normally the man kept them impeccable. But he had

been an idiot and Coulson was keeping him warm. That was nice. Especially when he caught sight of himself in the mirror and saw how Coulson's jacket clung to him.

He knew he was being stupid, but it was still nice to see. That simple attempt at keeping warm was more consideration than Loki had ever shown, or for that matter more than anyone else had shown either. He looked up at Coulson, and squeezed his hand.

"It's a nice outfit. But I think I like you in your normal clothes better." Coulson muttered, before pulling away slightly and going to mingle. Clint smirked and decided he should circulate as well. He had people to pester, and he had to try and see how annoyed he could make Fury before he ended up regretting it.

Chapter 8: Shopping

Chapter Summary

Finding the Avengers Tower was out of milk might not have been a common situation, but generally it wasn't likely to cause problems. But today, Steve has decided that the team is going on a shopping trip, and Coulson is supervising.

Coulson woke up the next morning to find that Clint had followed him to bed, curled up against his side with the clothes from the night before still on, the shoes on the floor beside him. He shook his head in mock despair but didn't push him away, stroking a thumb over Clint's cheek.

Clint's eyes flickered slightly, and he groaned softly as he returned to consciousness. Coulson nuzzled against his forehead, and Clint stretched, arching a little.

"Agh..." He muttered. "My head..."

"It's your own fault Barton." Coulson answered with a smirk, making the archer curl over, covering his head with a pillow.

"You have to get up and get dressed Clint." He told him, pushing him out of the way. Clint nodded, stumbling off to shower and get ready for the day. Coulson slowly got out of bed, and made it before showering himself, and dressing himself in a suit. Then he walked downstairs and sat on the couch, tapping his fingers on his tablet as he looked over the paperwork from the last night. It was almost relaxing.

He heard the steps of various team members in the hall as they made their way to the kitchen. Steve sat down beside him with a smile, looking a little flustered.

"I hope that you had a good time last night sir. It was good to see Clint looking so happy..."

"It's always good to see him happy. I hope that I can help him stay that way..." Coulson echoed, watching his childhood hero closely, worried that he was going to be condemned for what had happened.

Steve didn't seem bothered by his admission. Instead his face was split by a smile, and he nodded smartly once.

"I think you can."

Before Coulson could reply, Tony himself stumbled into the kitchen, opening the fridge.

"What the fuck. JARVIS, we're out of milk." He closed the door, then opened it once more in the hope that when he reopened it more milk would be sat there.

"The delivery has been delayed sir, I apologise."

"Can you just call a motorbike firm or something? Delivery riders?" Tony asked, still sleepily opening and closing the door in the hope it would magically acquire some milk.

"No." Steve got up and walked over to Tony, guiding his hand off of the fridge door. "We can go shopping and get some ourselves."

Coulson considered pointing out to Steve that this wasn't a good idea, that the Avengers would probably cause trouble somehow. The six of them together managed to cause difficulties whenever they left their house, but that was normally because they were on missions.

Before he got the chance to make this objection though, Steve seemed to settle on the idea. "We should all go. We need to have fun together, need a chance to relax and bond. We've been doing a few activities, especially in the evening and things, but doing this would be...I think this would be really a good idea. Jarvis, please cancel the order. I'll go and get everyone."

"As you wish Captain Rogers." JARVIS answered, even if the AI sounded a little reluctant.

Coulson blinked a little but tried to accept that this was happening. The whole team of them were going to go grocery shopping, and he was going to have to try and organise it.

He had the sudden mental image of holding the reins of a team of children, trying to stop Clint from running off, Natasha from shoplifting and Thor from eating the food as they walked past. His mental image altered slightly, until he was also attempting to drag a small Hulk behind him. The child had sat down and wasn't moving.

Coulson attempted to tell himself it wasn't going to be that bad, but he couldn't shake the sinking feeling in his stomach. Steve had that earnest look on his face though, so Coulson just tried to fake a smile.

"That looks painful." Clint informed him as he sat down beside him. His hangover appeared to have gone. "The fake smile works worse than your normal glaring face."

"Thank you Agent Barton for your always considerate comments."

"It's alright sir. No, seriously, what's wrong?"

"Steve wants us to go grocery shopping."

Clint paused, tilting his head and staring up at him.

"You're kidding right?"

Wordlessly Coulson shook his head, and Clint whistled low, closing his eyes for a moment.

"Well fuck..." He smirked. "Are you going to be trying to organise us?"

"I'm just trying to make sure that you aren't lost and don't cause an international incident."

"In the grocery store?"

"I do not for a second doubt your abilities Agent Barton."

Clint laughed.

"I don't doubt mine either."

Coulson raised a hand to rub his forehead. It was going to be a long day.

In the end, it only took Steve a few minutes to assemble the entire team in civilian clothes. No one looked like they were suffering that badly from the excesses of the previous night, which would hopefully make this simpler.

Coulson held out the list Jarvis had provided, and Steve turned to the team with a smile.

"We have a list of what we need to get today, and we are going to go and find it, pay for it

and bring it back here.”

Natasha’s expression was one of mild distaste, but it was Tony who began to protest.

“I have JARVIS exactly so that I don’t have to deal with this. That’s the entire reason I made him. I don’t do grocery shopping.”

That comment was met with Steve’s frown.

“What’s wrong with going shopping?” Steve asked and there was a confusion in his voice, a sense of loss almost. Coulson realised that even if shopping was going to be hard, it was something Steve wanted to do as part of a team. It was another step in his rehabilitation to life.

“Nothing.” Bruce and Tony answered simultaneously and the rest of the team nodded.

They made their way to the shops in relative quiet, talking amongst themselves, and Coulson was grateful for the good behaviour while it lasted. His chest still ached, but there was no way he could let them all go out to do this unsupervised. He stayed at the back, so that he could ensure Thor didn’t wander off. Once they reached the grocery store however, problems began.

The team split, Thor trying to find food like he was used to whilst Bruce explained to him what the ingredients were and how they had to be cooked. Clint had found free samples, and Natasha...had disappeared, which was never a good sign, although Coulson couldn’t motivate himself to care. Tony looked beyond bored, and was eyeing the self-service machines with interest.

Steve stood there, his shopping list clutched to his chest, watching the crowd with wide eyes. Then he steadied himself and marched forwards, picking up a basket as he went.

Coulson decided the best thing he could do was try and get this ordeal over as quickly as possible, and so followed Steve, grabbing Clint by the shoulder as he passed him. He made himself keep breathing calmly, despite the pain it caused.

Steve coped with the shopping admirably, only occasionally stopping to look at packets or brands with a wistful glimmer in his eye. Everything was going well, until they ended up in an aisle Coulson had hoped to avoid, with Steve picking up a pack of tampons and examining them curiously.

“We don’t need those.” Clint said quickly, snatching them from Steve.

“What are-“

“They’re for women.” Coulson explained patiently, and was rewarded by Steve going pink and practically running out of the aisle. Clint just smirked, and followed him.

For Steve, filling out the grocery list was a military operation to be carried out with absolute expert precision, and the basket filled up. Clint meanwhile kept adding cookies and candy and other treats. Coulson rolled his eyes, but he didn’t remove all of them from the basket. He wasn’t the one having to carry it.

The three of them made it safely around the shop, and paid for their purchases. Outside, they found that Bruce was waiting for them. Coulson left Bruce and Steve with the bags, then went to look for the other three, Clint trailing after him with a concerned expression on his face. His chest was hurting worse now but the handler made himself ignore it. He was still breathing alright, even if it was painful.

Thor was deep in discussion with the butcher over how to cook various meats. Judging by the poor man's expression, at least some of the animals being asked about weren't from Earth, but the god was easy enough to retrieve.

Tony was a little harder to track down, and by now Coulson was feeling more than a little out of breath. This was more movement than he had done for a long time, and he felt the room start to spin.

"Let me get you home." Clint told him, helping support him back out, and messaging Tony and Natasha to let them know they'd given up on waiting for them. Coulson allowed the help this once.

Chapter 9: Cheater

Chapter Summary

Clint continues to worry as his thoughts turn to Loki and he wonders if he'll be abandoned for someone better.

Clint helped Coulson back home, and settled him down in his office to rest, feeling guilty for exhausting him with the shopping. He wanted to have said they would have been fine without supervision, but he knew that they probably wouldn't have been - Steve would have managed if he'd gone on his own, but as a group they were a problem. Coulson was the solution, the one who could control them, and it was probably asking too much of him.

Once Coulson was at his desk and more relaxed, Clint made his way to the living room, to find Natasha already there, a smirk on her face as she ate some chocolates. "You didn't steal those did you?" Steve asked cautiously, but Natasha shook her head. She didn't steal, not like that, not unnecessarily. Satisfied, Steve left the room and Clint sat down beside Natasha, his arm wrapping around her shoulder.

She cuddled up against his side, holding out a chocolate and popping it into his mouth. He grinned at her and cuddled up again. It was just comfortable being close to her, and for a little longer they relaxed. Clint had missed this. As soon as he had returned, she had welcomed him back, and her friendship had helped to keep away the memories, the sensation of Loki's control still seeping through his mind, leaving him shaking. It had been constant apart from her, but with Coulson now as well he felt safe from his past.

Natasha stretched with a smile.

"I'm going to train Clint, I'll see you later..." With that, she left, and Clint was alone with his thoughts.

He couldn't stay like that for long. He walked along the corridor, heading up to Coulson's office and pushing it open.

Coulson was there, leaning in towards Steve, who was sat at the other side of the desk. They had clearly been deeply involved in conversation, and both were staring at him in shock. Steve grabbed some paper from the desk, and Clint moved to the side so that he could move past him. Coulson looked up, his face almost blank.

"Did I interrupt something?" Clint asked, trying to drown out Loki's whispers in his mind. The god had said that Coulson would never want him, that his stupid dreams simply showed how much of a fool he was. Coulson had always admired Captain America, had always seen him as a hero. Now, Coulson lived with Steve. Steve liked Tony. Clint tried to remind himself of that. Not that that was much help if Coulson was only interested in Steve.

"Only me asking Captain Rogers a favour. It wasn't important, it can wait... are you alright there?"

Clint nodded, because now he knew what had happened, he wasn't going to be able to explain what was wrong without sounding pathetic.

"Clint..." There was a patience in Coulson's voice, a steadiness that was always there, but there was a severity too. It was as though Coulson was genuinely hurt by the thought that Clint might not tell him that something was wrong.

"I'm alright. I'm with you now."

Coulson nodded, moving back from the table and signalling for Clint to come and sit beside him. The archer instead perched on the bench, his hand holding Coulson's own.

"I just know that you deserve better than me, and it eats away inside me. Which...I'm sorry. I know ...I'm sorry. It's just hard."

"It will be less hard if you tell me when you think like that." Coulson reprimanded, his hand reaching out for Clint's own.

"Why?"

"Because if I know, I can help. If I know, I can try and fix it, but I have to know for that to work, if that's understandable."

"I understand." Clint answered with a nod. "I just keep thinking how you deserve better."

"You think I'm going to cheat on you with Steve?"

"I think you'd like to."

Coulson frowned, and hurt flickered for a moment in his eyes.

"I like you. I admire Captain Rogers. I've always admired him, and I always will, but it was never attraction. I've wanted to be him, not to date him, and even if I did want to be in a relationship with Captain America, it would have been his persona, the part of him that is a superhero, not Steve Rogers. But Clint, it's you I like."

"Oh..." Clint suddenly felt guilty for ever doubting Coulson, knowing he had been foolish. But he couldn't stop those thoughts.

"The only cheating that's going on..." Coulson explained, holding out the tablet and calling up some emails. "Is from me trying to see if I can get Colonel Rhodes and Miss Potts on side, because I would like to be able to trust on their support with Tony, and because it would be wonderful to have a hero on board that is capable of behaving for a short period of time."

Clint managed a weak smile at that, and nodded, leaning in to kiss Coulson softly. He felt better now, calmer, and he was grateful for that.

"You think I can carry on with that now, or do you need to stay for a little longer?"

"I'm good." Clint kissed his cheek, then hopped off of the desk, going to the archery range. He needed to calm down, and this was working.

"I'm going to head into the office later alright?" Coulson told him, and Clint nodded smartly and let the door close behind him.

He lifted up the bow, and aimed at the target, pulling back the string, losing himself in the steady reassurance of the shot. He was calm and he felt relaxed.

"You okay there Katniss?" Tony's voice behind him made him tense a little, but he tried not to let it bother him, and he turned to the engineer.

"I'm fine."

"Yeh, you are..." Tony grinned, and Clint rolled his eyes.

"Just go and flirt with Steve." He shooed him away. Tony lingered, so Clint tried to ignore him and carry on.

Chapter 10: Around the Office

Chapter Summary

Coulson goes to report to Fury, and realises that he and Clint were the last to find out about their own relationship.

Coulson sat at his desk in the tower, thinking over the brief meeting he had had with Clint. He was very aware of the archer's self esteem issues, a leftover from Trickshot's treatment of him. There was only so many times a child could be told that they were worthless, hated, pathetic, before it burrowed down so deep in their mind that it could never be chased away.

He was hurt by the insinuation that he would consider leaving Clint for Steve, both because of the lack of trust it showed and because it somehow diminished his actual feelings for the Captain - which were those of respect rather than desire. But he knew Clint's thoughts and understood that had never been what he had thought. Clint just didn't think he was good enough.

Coulson planned to change that.

First though, he felt he had to go and see the Director. It had been Fury's push that had persuaded him to ask Clint out initially, and he wanted to thank him for all that he had done for them both. He wasn't sure if it was going to work out between them, but they had a chance now and for that Fury deserved thanks. That wasn't the only reason for his visit - he was hoping to get cleared for some field missions, because endless simple paperwork was driving him to distraction, but it was a good place to start. So he headed to the headquarters, driving slowly. He hadn't technically been cleared to drive yet, but he felt safer driving himself than asking any of the Avengers (especially Natasha) to.

He parked in his usual spot, taking a few minutes to recover his breath before he headed to the Director's office.

Fury called him in after a few moments, fixing him with a focused gaze.

"Well?" Was all the man asked, and Coulson felt himself grow almost tongue tied. It wasn't as bad as when he had first met Captain Rogers, and Fury was one of his oldest friends, but the words still didn't come easily.

"I spoke to him. Thank you sir, you were right. We plan to continue working together, and whilst we are on the clock our behaviour will be entirely professional."

Fury clearly didn't believe him for a second, and Coulson could feel his face heating up but he stared straight ahead anyway.

"Alright. About fucking time." Fury answered, and he dipped a hand into a draw, pulling out a small black book and flicking through it. "If you'd taken much longer, I'd have lost fifty

bucks."

"Huh?" Coulson was aware the noise he made wasn't exactly coherent but he was confused by what had been said.

"There was a pool going on whether you two would get together."

"Was Agent Romanoff involved?" Coulson asked. It seemed to be the most important question to him - after all she knew them better than anyone else, and if anyone was going to have insider information it was her.

"Agent Romanoff was running the pool. Only, that is, after she had convinced everyone that you weren't already a couple."

Coulson stood there for a moment, dumbfounded, until Fury signalled for him to sit down. He tried to process that.

"People thought we were together?"

"Most of SHIELD were certain of it. You've got a rapport with him that no one else managed, and considering his reputation..." Fury raised his hands when Coulson shot him a glare. "I meant his reputation as a troublemaker Phil, nothing else." Coulson had the decency to look embarrassed by his part in that exchange.

Fury continued after Coulson gave a slight shrug.

"Well, Agent, considering he was well known to be one of the worst behaved Agents we had, the fact you and he were talkative on comms, shared jokes and socialised off hours was seen as unusual, especially when the previous handlers he had had done all they could to avoid him."

"His previous handlers had no idea of the asset in their hands."

"Be that as it may, people talk." Fury smirked. "Especially here. We're an intelligence agency, we're full of gossip."

Coulson stared at him.

"And you bet on my love life?"

"Only because I was pretty sure you'd have to pull your head out of your ass and talk to the boy some day. Now, was finding out you're the subject of office rumours your sole reason to visit?"

"No sir. I wanted to say thank you for giving me a shove in the right direction, I needed it. And I wanted..." He hesitated for a moment, swallowed and then carried on. "I wanted to request a chance to work actively with the Avengers in the field. I've got through all the paperwork assigned, and I can move around far more now. I'm meant to be in charge of that team, and I can't do it from a desk."

"If I were to say no, Agent, how much longer would you wait before you snuck out and went to follow them in the field, with no preparation."

"A week or two at most sir."

"I thought so." Fury answered, but he was smiling. "So yes, you can go back in the field, and you can try and keep that group of idiots in line. You are still going to be doing the paperwork, because god knows they're going to be generating a lot of it. I look forwards to seeing you come up with new forms for whatever it is that Stark manages next."

"I shall try not to disappoint sir."

"See that you don't. If I find out that you've missed any of your therapy sessions, or any medical treatments, I'll see if Agent Hill is willing to take on responsibility for Doctor Banner, Captain Rogers and Thor, and you can just keep the difficult little shits."

Coulson laughed slightly, knowing that Hill would never take that offer and that Fury knew that.

"Understood sir."

"I mean it Agent. Any problems, you get worse, and you are off field work. Now, if you'll excuse me, I've got some money to collect."

Chapter 11: Onesies

Chapter Summary

Steve's attempts at dress down Fridays don't go quite to plan.

Chapter Notes

Definitely one of the weirder prompts! Still, I hope you enjoy it

Once Coulson was cleared for field work, it became easier for the Avengers to settle into a routine of sorts. There was still awkwardness, moments of tension as they found points on each other that should be left well alone, times when they said the wrong thing, but everything was beginning to settle down.

Steve was still trying to fulfill the role of leader, but since he listened to the rest of them, no one actually minded. He was adapting well, and so earnest to do right by the team. Tony couldn't resist taking advantage of that sincerity, and nor could Clint. There was too much stress in their lives, they had to find ways of relaxing, and taking advantage of the Captain's determined honesty was just too easy a method.

It had been Tony who had suggested Dress Down Fridays to Steve, after the success of movie night and junk food. Steve had been pushing for more team bonding exercises, and whilst he clearly didn't really approve of casual wear when they should be working, and despite his half-hearted protests of "Tony, we could be called into battle at any time", it seemed he liked the idea.

No one was quite sure what Tony would have suggested wearing if it was down to him, considering his normal clothing would be counted as casual by most. Luckily, it didn't end up being relevant, as Clint had a better idea.

The archer settled back on the sofa, beside Natasha who was the only one who had managed to escape his plans. She was wearing jeans and a T-shirt with a picture of Captain America's shield on, and had refused to join the fun, and even Clint wasn't going to argue with her. But everyone else had fallen into line perfectly, and were lazing around in onesies, waiting for Steve to arrive.

Bruce was sitting on Natasha's other side, wearing a green one with dinosaur spikes down his back - Clint had chosen it, and whilst the scientist hadn't looked overly impressed, he had at least smiled. Clint had found a purple onesie with small wings embroidered on the shoulder

blades for himself, whilst Tony had unsurprisingly managed to find one in the pattern of the Iron Man suit, because he had a good marketing department.

Thor loved them. He was on the phone to Jane in the corner of the room, discussing his own Dalmatian-print clothing with her in a quiet-for-a-god voice.

"They are so comfortable my lady. I should like to spend a day just like this, and we can cuddle, and then we shall retire to bed and -"

Luckily Tony turned up the music, as Clint tried to stop listening. He might have no problem with Doctor Foster, but there were still some things he didn't want to hear. The call ended after a few more minutes, and Thor came to sit beside Tony as the music turned down. Tony rolled his eyes but didn't actually move him away.

The door opened, and Steve walked in, looking at all of them. His forehead furrowed, and the cogs whirring in his brain were practically visible before he mouthed "Dress down Friday..." He sighed, and looked at the group, clearly trying to decide if they needed a speech about their actions.

A moment later, he seemed to decide that they didn't, and he just nodded.

"We got you one Cap." Tony told him with a smirk.

"It's in your size..." Natasha explained, pointing at one decorated with the flag.

"That's disrespectful..." Steve muttered.

"Cap, you wear a flag all the time. Anyway, it'll be good for the team if you wear it." Tony insisted, and Steve blushed but walked over and picked it up, heading into the kitchen for relative privacy. He returned in it, arms crossed, and sat next to Tony, trying to ignore everyone. Clint couldn't stop grinning.

"JARVIS, take some pictures for me." Tony demanded.

"As you wish sir."

The door opened again and Coulson looked in at them all, then attempted to back from the room. Clint was too fast for him.

"Hey! Phil..." He grinned. "I got you one."

Coulson looked again at the group, eyes lingering on Natasha.

"You'd never make it out of the tower before I caught you when you are injured." Natasha informed him smugly, and Coulson nodded sadly, exchanging a glance with Steve.

"Can I have it?" He asked Clint.

Clint reached beneath the sofa, and brought out a wrapped bundle which he presented with a flourish. Coulson opened it hesitantly, then laughed, as he found a onesie decorated like a suit. Tony clapped, and Coulson shook his head.

Clint smirked, and raised an eyebrow.

"You chicken? Anyway, Cap said we had to wear informal clothes on Friday, and you're in a suit. So go and get dressed, you're breaking the rules."

Phil sighed, but went to put it on, returning and sitting in an armchair. Clint got up and perched on the armrest, leaning against him, his hand stroking the back of Coulson's own.

"Thanks." He muttered, too quietly to be heard by the rest. Coulson just nodded once, and leaned up to kiss him. Clint brushed his lips against Coulson's then settled back with a grin.

"What are the plans for today Cap?" Tony asked, acting perfectly normally, resting his head on Steve's shoulder. "Any other team building activities?"

"You're lucky I don't have you running laps..." Steve answered, but there was no harshness in his voice.

Clint looked around at the group, and realised that he felt almost at home in this insanity. It was a bizarre thought, but luckily not one he had to try and process for very long, as a moment later the air filled with the sound of gunfire, muffled but still undeniable.

"Sir. An armoured vehicle has just pulled up outside, and they appear to be attempting to shoot their way in."

Steve groaned as the team raced to deal with the problem, Tony slipping on the Mark VII bracelets and Clint grabbing up his bow. Coulson stayed behind, getting JARVIS to pass on orders and information. Their enemies were getting sloppy if this was the best they could do.

"This is why I expected you to wear sensible clothes!" Steve explained as he opened the door to be met by a hail of bullets, swinging his shield out in front of him to deflect them before he threw it to knock their opponents down, Natasha rushing out to immobilize them as Clint drew an arrow. Cameras flickered from the watching crowd. "I didn't want to fight in pyjamas!"

"Tough." Tony answered. By now, Tony was safely in the suit, and so away from any judgments about his fashion choices. Clint didn't envy him, he was quite happy being caught in the ridiculous outfit and was curious as to future headlines, but Steve looked mortified.

It didn't take long for the goons to be rounded up, and once SHIELD had collected them they returned upstairs to watch movies. Clint sauntered over to Coulson with a smirk.

"You see that sir."

"I did."

"One day I'll have to show you what else I can do in pyjamas."

Coulson's passive expression altered for a second to show a smirk.

"Oh, I'm sure you can do much more out of them."

Clint nearly choked on the popcorn he had shoved in his mouth, whilst Coulson's face returned to being as calm as ever.

Chapter 12: Spooning

Chapter Summary

Clint and Coulson cuddle up together, only to be woken by Clint's nightmares.

Chapter Notes

Warnings: hints of past sexual abuse

Coulson lay back in bed, smiling to himself. The film viewing had gone well with no further interruptions, and the only thing he had to worry about now was the fact that Clint had managed to worm his way into his bed, both of them still dressed in the ridiculous onesies from earlier.

Clint nestled up close beside him, and Coulson wrapped his arms around him, kissing the juncture of his neck and ear, breath warm on his skin. Clint let out a soft noise of pleasure and then closed his eyes.

"You're warm."

"Go to sleep Clint." Coulson whispered, kissing his cheek. "You need the rest."

"Fine..." Clint pouted, but his eyes closed, and he drifted off. Coulson watched him for a couple of minutes, and then once he was sure that Clint was actually asleep, he let himself fall into slumber, arms still around the archer.

Coulson's sleep was peaceful, full of calming dreams and laughter. His arms kept up their grip, as he imagined walking with Clint through a city somewhere, Italy perhaps, although the location kept switching between Naples and Florence. The mission was over and they could relax. He was happy there.

He only reluctantly surfaced from his dream when he became aware of Clint tensing in his arms. Most people Coulson had witnessed have nightmares, himself included, thrashed around, cried out, tried to push their invisible assailants off of them or run away from their pursuers. They tried to escape.

Clint just stayed still. His body would tense, and his breathing would become a little shallower, but he wouldn't make any noise, wouldn't even cry. He wouldn't try to run because his mind told him that there was no point trying. He was used to being trapped, being

cornered, and knowing that there was nothing he could do. Even in his nightmares he was powerless.

"Clint..." Coulson shook his shoulder gently, aware that there was a risk of him lashing out if he did anything unexpectedly. "Clint, wake up... it's safe."

It took a few moments for that to filter through to Clint's mind, but then his eyes snapped open. He looked around the room, and his gaze came to rest on Coulson. He went almost limp with relief as he took a few deep breaths.

"Hey. Thanks."

"It's okay Clint. Wasn't going to leave you there."

Clint turned, clinging to him and burying his head against Coulson's chest, taking the time to reassure himself that he was real. The pressure hurt the still healing wound, but Clint needed this, and Coulson would not dream of denying it. He rubbed his back, leaving him a few more moments before he spoke again.

"Do you want to talk about it?"

Clint looked up at him, uncertainty on his face, tilting his head and then nodding once.

"Yes. It was... Loki...I was...telling him. Everything. Everything you and Tasha trusted me with, everything SHIELD gave me. All I could think of was trying to do well, to please him, to make him say well done. Then...he didn't say it. Because I wasn't good enough. Because no matter what I gave him, even when I gave him everything, it wasn't enough. Then I..." He shrugged. "I saw Trickshot there smirking, and I knew I was a failure. I've let down everyone. Fucking up and letting people down, that's what I'm good for."

"That's not true Clint..." Coulson spoke softly, feeling pained by his words. "You are good enough. You're good at so many things."

"Got a good ass."

"Clint." Coulson tried to keep the anger out of his voice. He knew Clint didn't mean it, that it wasn't him thinking but just echoes of other people's words. It still hurt to hear.

"Clint, you are amazing. You are good at so much more than that, and I don't want you to doubt it. You are good enough. You are one of our best agents, a good friend, and..." He just shrugged and kissed him softly. "You are good enough."

Clint nodded, hesitating slightly.

"I... just... I keep thinking you won't want me. Damaged goods right? Already been with loads of people and you could have anyone. I just..."

"I want you Clint." Coulson answered, stroking his shoulders. "I want you, I just don't want to hurt you."

"You wouldn't."

"Alright... I need to know what you like Clint. And what you don't. You're too valuable to me for me to risk messing this up."

"I...like most stuff. I've done a lot." Clint shrugged. "Um. Don't mess with my mind, weaponry remains outside of the bedroom, strangulation's not fun if you pass out..." he continued making offhand comments, and then hesitated.

"What is it Clint?" Coulson asked tenderly. He knew it was this that mattered, that he'd used the others to smokescreen from. He needed to hear what it was that was worrying Clint.

"Blindfolds. Um. I don't... I don't like not seeing. I really don't like not seeing, so unless you're actually aiming for me to tense up and hyperventilate I wouldn't recommend it."

Coulson didn't dignify the latter part of that comment with a response, just nodded and held him, stroking his hair.

"No blindfolds..."

Clint spun in his arms, turning towards him and kissing him softly, his legs tangling with Coulson's own.

"Thanks."

"It's alright Clint. I'm never going to do anything you don't want, okay? That's how this works. Nothing happens that we don't want. We look after each other."

Clint looked up at him as though this was a new idea, and that thought hurt Coulson's heart. But he would teach him better. He cuddled him close, kissing him and then letting him cuddle up again once more.

"I won't let anyone hurt you again Clint. Not like that."

Clint shrugged slightly, and Coulson smiled.

"You won't let anyone hurt me either will you."

"No." Clint answered calmly, and seemed to relax. "No I won't."

"Knew I could count on you."

They both fell asleep.

Chapter 13: Icecream

Chapter Summary

Tony gets his hands on liquid nitrogen and decides to make icecream for the team. No one can be trusted to eat it.

The day started, as many of the more interesting days at Avengers Tower did, with Tony Stark strolling into breakfast with a smile on his face. Admittedly, this time he didn't look completely sleep deprived, but that was the only real difference. He grinned at Steve, who handed him a plate of breakfast, then sat down opposite Bruce.

"Guess what!"

"What Tony?" He asked patiently, a slight smile on his face, genuinely curious as to why he was so amused.

"I got a new toy..." The engineer almost sang. "New liquid nitrogen, finally found some experiments that needed it, I mean, I know I should be responsible but it's just fun..."

Steve groaned slightly in mock frustration, then smiled and walked out. "I'll leave the two of you to that, I don't want to know what you're planning. Try and leave the tower in one piece. Or at least upright."

"Aye-aye cap." Tony answered with a grin, staring at the supersoldier's body as he headed to the gym.

Clint focussed on eating his breakfast when Tony and Bruce began to talk quietly to each other in scientist. He didn't know what was going on, but they seemed to be happy with whatever it was they had decided on, and that was enough for him. He stopped paying much attention, heading to the gym with Natasha when they went to the labs.

"You slept in Phil's bed again last night?" Natasha asked.

If the question had come from anyone else, Clint would have tensed at that question, would have attempted to deny it. But Natasha had asked, and he trusted her more than anything.

"Yeh. I've been staying there recently. I find I can sleep better there."

"The dreams aren't so loud?" She asked, and he nodded. "Then stay there Clint. Let someone take care of you."

Clint opened his mouth to reply, but was cut off by JARVIS's calm voice.

"If everyone is free, sir and Doctor Banner request that you head to the laboratory in order to try some of the ice-cream that they are making."

Clint grinned, and raced to the lab, followed by Natasha at a more sedate pace. Thor was already there.

There was a large vat that was giving off white vapours, and in front of it was Dummy, holding a spoon and stirring a mixture whilst Tony carefully poured in some of the steaming liquid. Dummy carried on stirring, and Bruce tested it for taste before using an ice-cream scoop to put the treat onto the cones that had been positioned in a test tube rack which Butterfingers was holding.

Clint grabbed one that was offered to him, as did Thor, and Natasha after a few more moments. Natasha raised an eyebrow, running her tongue carefully across the width of the ice-cream, her eyes closing. Clint laughed but mirrored her actions, glancing to the door just as Coulson walked in to get his own ice-cream.

"Here you go Agent!" Tony handed over the cone cheerfully. "Well, your agents seem to like the ice-cream..." he took his own, petting Dummy and Butterfingers absentmindedly. "Good team work boys."

Coulson arched an eyebrow and glanced at them.

"They do..." He was used to the two of them, and could keep calm in much worse situations than this. At least, that was what he seemed to be telling himself as he watched Clint's tongue caress the ice-cream, surprisingly intimate. Normally Clint was too keen on food to try and show off, but it seemed he'd decided to make an exception for today. Coulson stood his ground and refused to shift awkwardly as he watched that tongue. Clint gazed up at him, knowing he was watching, and Coulson looked away.

Clint laughed and went back to eating his ice-cream normally, which Coulson was grateful for. It just made it a little easier to eat his own. Clint moved to stand next to him, and his tongue darted out to lick the older agent's cheek.

"I've got a very talented tongue you know."

"I do not doubt that for a second Barton." He answered, smirking for a second before impassivity returned. "You're not the only one..." He licked over his own cone, and Clint let out a slight whine of need. Coulson just carried on eating as though nothing had happened.

Clint glared, and crossed his arms, then decided to try and bother Tony. He caught his eye and wrapped his lips over the ice-cream cone. Tony just rolled his eyes and smirked.

"You got ice-cream?" Steve called from the doorway, walking in with a grin. "Oh, this is great Tony..."

"Yeh, you want some Cap?" Tony asked, but he was already warming up the scoop, looking at the team leader. "You like it?"

"Yeh... I didn't know you could make it...Oh! Did Dummy and Butterfingers help? They're so good, aren't you boys..." He spoke to the robots, picking up the cone Tony held out to him.

"Thank you Tony!"

Clint watched, amused, as Steve began to eat it. Without realising there was a competition, and just eating it calmly, Steve somehow managed to be erotic, the food dripping down his chin and leaving his lips white, before his tongue darted to catch the droplets.

Clint glanced up at Coulson, worried that he would have been distracted. Coulson just smiled, and leaned across to nibble some of the remains of Clint's ice cream cone. Clint's free hand found Coulson's and squeezed for a moment, reassured.

Natasha had finished her ice-cream, and was looking instead at the liquid nitrogen apparatus, asking about it. Bruce was happy to answer, but Tony was silent. It didn't take Clint long to realise why - he was staring at Steve, obviously lost for words. Clint just grinned, and reached out for Coulson's hand. "It's a good day. Wanna go back to bed?"

Coulson's hand rested on his back.

"Maybe. But we're busy later, and first... well, I thought we could go to the comic book store."

"You just want me to carry your bags for you."

"Of course. Now, come on."

Chapter 14: Corset

Chapter Summary

Coulson finds out about a mission Clint has been assigned, and is worried about the impact it will have on the archer.

Chapter Notes

Warnings; mentions of prostitution

Thanks to Shadowhaloedangel who inspired me for Coulson's attitude in this.

Coulson walked back to the tower slowly, keeping an eye on Clint who was walking beside him, weighed down by the comic books they had bought - well, that he had bought aside from the two that Clint had decided to get him on a whim as a gift. Small actions like that meant a lot to Coulson - not because it showed Clint was thinking of him, but because it showed that the archer had enough confidence in his economic situation to spend money that way.

For the first few years of joining SHIELD, Clint had hoarded every cent that he could. When you were used to not having money, when you knew dearly how much poverty could cost, you were careful. In Clint's case, it had gone beyond careful, to the point where it was irritating and Coulson had struggled to remind himself his agent wasn't deliberately being difficult. Now it seemed a corner had been turned.

"You're thinking again." Clint teased, a soft smile on his lips as he spoke to him. "What about?"

"You. How amazing you are." That answer had the desired effect of Clint snorting, and then dropping the conversation, allowing the two of them to get home in silence. They headed up to Phil's rooms, Clint putting down the bags with a groan of relief as Coulson opened his phone.

"You are one indulged geek Coulson..." He teased, before looking over at him. "Hey... Hey, are you okay?" He asked, seeing the stony expression on Coulson's face.

"I'm fine." Coulson answered quickly, then hesitated. "Well no, I'm not fine, but I will be. I've just got some details through about a mission for you." He stared at the screen, trying to sort out his thoughts.

"So?" Clint asked, head tilted to the side, waiting for the bad news.

"It's at a strip club... you'll be working undercover as one of the employees, and you just...you wouldn't... I mean, you just need to plant a bug on one of the patrons, we certainly wouldn't expect you to..." Coulson stumbled over his words, trying to explain his concerns without insulting Clint.

"You're just jealous at the thought of me stripping in front of a crowd of men that aren't you?"

"Something like that." Coulson answered. "I mean, I'll be there. I just..." He reached out for Clint's hand, gazing into his eyes, seeking out the insecurity that he knew lay behind that cocky attitude and tough smirk. "I just know you deserve better than this Clint."

"I..." Clint's voice faltered for a moment, and Coulson squeezed his shoulder.

"I mean it Clint. The past is the past."

"There's a reason they chose me."

"Yes, you're good at planting bugs, you match the people employed at the club, and you are a skilled agent. We can trust you not to panic, to be able to improvise. Anything else is unrelated..." He looked deep into Clint's eyes. "Clint, you have to trust me on this. You've been assigned this job because you are a trustworthy agent and a skilled operative, and not because of anything else..."

Clint shrugged a little, his head down. He couldn't believe it, and Coulson didn't blame him - it just seemed obvious that part of the reason he would be chosen for this would be because of his past. It wasn't fair, and it stuck in Coulson's throat. He didn't know the reason why Clint had been assigned this job - it might have been his past, might have been his skills as an agent, or might just have been that it was his turn to do the dirty work. Whatever it was, Coulson was angry at the assignment. He knew that anger was irrational, that he couldn't want special treatment for Clint, but he wished he could have spared him that.

"You're a good agent."

"I get all the jobs where they need whores. SHIELD knows what I am."

"You're an archer."

"I..." Clint was shaking now, words failing him as he got caught in a tangle of emotion and anger.

"Clint... what happened happened. You are an archer, a sniper of world class calibre. As for the past, much of it wasn't your fault, and when it was you choosing to do so you chose because you didn't want to starve, because you had no better option. Trust me, I do not blame you for a second."

"Well you should!" Clint snapped back, eyes blazing brightly at that. "You should blame me. You should hate me." He was taking deep breaths, glaring ahead, his body tense as though he were waiting to be hit.

"I don't hate you Clint." Coulson promised gently, trying to defuse the situation. He'd seen Clint react this way before, and it always was upsetting to witness. The incidents were less frequent now, but they still happened and he had to try and calm him down. "I don't hate you. You were hungry and you were alone. We found you and it's in the past now. It's just a memory. It can't change who you are now."

"You saw me like that..." Clint swallowed, remembering what it had been like, to be cold and needing to eat. He'd stolen, he'd killed to order and he'd sold his body for food and warmth.

He'd done a lot he wasn't proud of back then, and it seemed SHIELD still weren't above holding it against him.

"Yes. I did. And I saw what you could be." Coulson answered, rubbing his side gently. "I saw what you were capable of being, how much potential you had. I see that now, you've done so much and you can do more... it's one mission Clint. And if you say no, they won't insist." "I can do this." Clint answered, and Coulson nodded, gathering him up against his chest and holding him close, knowing that for Clint managing this was important. They stood like that for some time.

It was another two days until the mission itself took place, and Clint spent time shooting, as well as memorising information about the target, and the workplace. Coulson was careful to discuss everything with him, ensuring he was ready for the mission like he would for any other job. He didn't want to take his hands off Clint for a moment, needing to reassure him and try to cut out any negative thoughts.

When it was time, Coulson helped Clint to get ready, fastening the corset over his chest, kissing at his muscular shoulders.

"I look fucking stupid." Clint complained.

"You...don't look your best." Coulson agreed with an indulgent smile, holding him close and stroking his side before sending him to the club.

"I'll be there in the audience. I'm never abandoning you..." He kissed him softly, and tried to pretend he didn't see the flicker of doubt in Clint's eyes.

Chapter 15: Different Clothing

Chapter Summary

Clint carries out a mission and goes home with Coulson.

Clint made himself leave his doubts at the door of the club. It wasn't just the doubts he left there, it was his identity, his thoughts and feelings and emotions. It was easier to set them down while he could, go out and dance and forget. He'd remember later, when it was safe, when he could process the emotions. For now, what mattered was trying to complete the mission. Everything was the mission.

He headed in, talking briefly to the manager, explaining the cover that had been agreed before, and then going on to the stage. He decided he didn't like wearing a corset, it restricted his movement too much, and it was just uncomfortable. He didn't let it bother him, moving among the low lights, looking around the audience, scanning the crowd of faces for the one that he was meant to be targeting.

He tried to lie to himself, to say that was the only face he was looking for. But when he caught sight of Coulson at the front, in a pair of loose black trousers and a t-shirt, he realised that he was relieved by it. He hadn't known, until that moment, whether Coulson planned to stick to his promise. Once he saw him, he knew it had always been certain.

But it wasn't Coulson that he was here for, even if he wished it was. He danced, body moving through the motions without engaging his mind. He was strong enough to support his weight on the pole, and he made use of it, wrapping his legs around it, tucking his ankle into place and leaning backwards.

From his upside-down position, he caught sight of the man he was here for. He smirked as he straightened, dropping down onto the stage and gazing into the eyes of the mark.

The mark smiled back, beckoning him over, and Clint for a moment feigned hesitation before crawling forwards, ass swaying, never looking away from his eyes. He leaned over towards him, grateful for how close he was to the front of the stage. This made it all a lot easier. He just smirked at him, moving off of the stage and circling him, hand maintaining contact with his shoulder. Once he'd completed a circuit around the man he brought up the second hand, leaning to dance on his lap, pressing up close to him, licking his lips as he gazed into his eyes, knowing that he wouldn't notice the slight movement as he dropped the bug into his top pocket when he ran his hands over his chest.

The man raised an eyebrow and mouthed something, holding up a note. Clint grinned, letting the mark press it into his waistband, arching into the hand that explored his body on the way past. He nibbled his own lip before his tongue flicked out over the flesh, then he pulled back,

moving away to dance with other customers, keeping the act up. The mission had been a success, but he still had some way to go before he was out safely.

Luckily, after a couple of other patrons he was able to make his way to Coulson, dance on his lap and lean in to kiss his ear.

"Did I do good?" He asked, already knowing the answer but wanting to hear Coulson saying it.

"You did wonderfully." Coulson answered, hands on his waist, rubbing circles over his flesh.

"Now, let's go home..." He held out some money which Clint took once more, and then left the stage to widespread applause.

He had done it. He'd pulled off the mission, and he tried to focus on that even when he felt dirty when he thought about it too hard. He'd done what he had to, and this time there was a good reason. He left the club, and found Coulson waiting for him in a rented car. He was glad to get in it, to lean against Coulson's shoulder and have him wrap his arms around him.

"I did it." He muttered, shaking a little.

"You did it. I'm so proud of you Clint...now come on... let's go home, and we can have a shower, and I can fill in the paperwork for both of us, does that sound good?"

Clint nodded wordlessly, falling against his shoulder. He couldn't quite bring himself to break contact with Coulson at that moment. Luckily Coulson didn't seem to object, resting his hand on his knee as he drove him home. Clint looked out of the window and allowed himself to relax a little.

They parked in the tower garage and headed straight up to Coulson's rooms. That was the first time Clint could see Coulson in the light, and he took a moment to appreciate the chance to see his handler out of his suit. That was when he actually noticed the t-shirt Coulson was wearing. It was grey, and emblazoned across it in dark purple font was "Archers do it with a quiver". Clint couldn't help laughing at that, and nearly doubled over in amusement. Coulson just smirked.

"I could have seen that on the job!" Clint complained. "You could have blown my cover."

"You're a professional Clint..." Coulson answered, resting a hand over the corset, and it didn't sound like an insult. "Anyway, I wanted to make you smile."

"You've had that shirt waiting?"

"Just needed to find the right moment. I definitely did."

"You're one weird, weird man..."

"Yeh... but you're right..." Coulson was smirking softly and Clint began to mirror his expression. "It could have got you in trouble..." Clint knew that was a lie, but he was happy to play along.

"It could have. It's probably best you take it off... actually, let me..." Clint stepped forwards, taking the t-shirt and lifting it over the older man's head, kissing at his shoulders once they were exposed. Coulson's hands raised to the corset, and he carefully began to unfasten it.

Clint grinned, glad Coulson wanted to take that off before this got too heavy. It helped him feel valued for himself in a weird way, a way Coulson had long since mastered and no one

else had ever managed.

“I think you mentioned a shower?”

“I think I did...” He agreed, resting a hand on Clint’s back, and guiding him through to the shower. Clint leant in for another kiss as he peeled off his own trousers, Coulson’s hands resting on his ass as he stroked his finger over Coulson’s waistband.

“You wanna join me?” Clint asked, leaning in again to nibble at his handler’s lips. Coulson nodded wordlessly, and Clint undid the older man’s jeans, pushing them down with his underwear, and kissing him once more.

Coulson lead him back to the shower, and Clint fumbled for the switch, stepping back into the warm water and holding out his hands for Coulson, pulling him close. Coulson’s hands stroked down his back, and Clint leaned in to kiss him once more, tangling his legs with Coulson’s as he rocked their bodies together, his hand slipping between them to stroke their cocks, mouth over Coulson’s to swallow the noises that were escaping him.

Clint gazed up into Coulson’s eyes, kissing him once more, gasping and nibbling on Coulson’s neck, careful not to leave any marks that would show when he was wearing his uniform. He pushed forwards, backing Coulson against the wall, his lips and teeth moving down to nip at his chest, smiling as he felt Coulson’s breath catching in his throat. Coulson’s hand squeezed his ass, and his hips bucked forwards, pressing against his body.

“Close babe...” Coulson whispered in his ear. Clint moaned, stroking faster before he climaxed, collapsing forwards against Coulson, inhaling his scent, then falling down onto his knees, taking Coulson’s cock past his lips, sucking hard. He looked up at him, smirking as best as he could with his mouth full. Above him, Coulson groaned, and he licked him clean, swallowing down the taste of him.

He got back to his feet, leaning in to kiss his handler, and letting Coulson wash him. He reached out and took his hand.

“Bed time?”

“Yeh...” Coulson’s hand squeezed his. “I’m not letting you go tonight...”

Clint smiled softly, kicking the clothes he had worn earlier over to the side, and flopping back on the bed, holding his hands up towards him. Coulson obligingly lay down by his side and Clint snuggled up, tucking Coulson’s arms around him.

Chapter 16: Morning Rituals

Chapter Summary

Coulson wakes up to the smell of coffee, and realises he has to talk to Clint.

Chapter Notes

Mentions of prostitution

Coulson opened his eyes slowly, feeling a warm body pressed against him. He tilted his head slightly, taking a look at what was there. It was Clint, curled up against him, his head resting on Coulson's shoulder, arms and legs wrapped around him.

Coulson allowed himself to smile for a few moments. He never would have imagined that Clint was a cuddler, when he found it so easy to be distant, and found contact and affection so hard. Still, Clint always had been full of surprises, and Coulson thought he rather liked this one.

He wrapped his arm around him, resting his hand on Clint's hip and stroking it gently, closing his eyes once more. He could sleep now. He had done what he could. That was what he had to accept, even if it hurt. He had done what he could, and he could keep Clint safe. He couldn't take back the past, or even change the previous night, but he could hold him now. He could do that, and it would be enough.

He let his eyes slip closed again, after he saw that Clint was smiling. No matter what the morning brought, they had done what they could now. And for this moment at least, they were happy.

He woke a little later to the familiar beep of his alarm clock, and a cold bed. He looked around, worried by where Clint could have gone, wondering if he might have already left. That thought made him sit up, worrying slightly before relaxing at the smell of coffee and the sight of Clint returning with two mugs. He put them down on the bedside cabinet and laid back down against Coulson's arms.

"You look worried."

"Yeh. I was... I was worried you'd gone."

"Why the fuck would I go Coulson? I had a good time last night, and assuming you had one too...well, I'd like to do a repeat of it some time."

"Maybe with fewer strip clubs." Coulson answered, with the slightest raise of an eyebrow.

Clint nodded.

"Yeh. Maybe fewer strip clubs. But I'm quite up for some more shower sex..."

"One track mind Clint." Coulson answered with a laugh, sitting up and picking up the coffee mugs, holding them out, one to each of them. They curled up by each other's sides, sipping their drinks.

"You in any rush to start work?" Clint asked, "Or do I get to cuddle up with you for a little longer?"

"We can cuddle together. I'll work in a while." Coulson answered, stroking his hand over Clint's thigh. "I like cuddling up with you." He could see the concern in Clint's eyes, knew that he needed to not be alone for a little while. He could give him that.

"Okay. Coffee, and then we can shower, and maybe then we've got to worry about things like paperwork. You sure you can handle yesterday's on your own?"

Coulson leant in and kissed Clint, and he tasted of coffee.

"I'm sure of it."

"Now, as for that shower..." Clint asked slowly. "You wanna repeat of last night?"

"We've got plenty of time for that Barton. We've got as long as you want. I think this time, it might be nice to just... cuddle for a bit, get to know each other. It doesn't all..." Coulson's voice failed him as he tried to work out how to explain without insulting his archer.

"Doesn't all have to be about sex?"

"Something like that. You're worth so much to me Clint. To this team, and to SHIELD. You deserve patience."

"You getting cold feet after last night?" Clint asked, and there was suspicion there, fear even. Coulson sighed, realising how easily Clint expected to be abandoned or forgotten or unwanted. He held him close, stroking his fingers through the archer's hair as he tried to fix this.

"No. Not for one moment. I do not regret what happened last night, and I never would. But I just want to take a little while before we repeat it. Because I want the chance to get to know you, to look after you and show you I value you."

"It's not that you don't want to fuck a whore?"

"You are not a whore Clint. Not at all. What happened in your past happened, and it wasn't right but I don't blame you. It doesn't define you, and I am not ashamed of you. As for sleeping with you... I want sex with you Clint. I really want sex with you. I want to make love with you. But I see no point in rushing for that now, when we can take it slow and appreciate it that much more. So no, I don't want to fuck a whore. I want to make love to my boyfriend, if he'll let me."

He spoke calmly, gazing into Clint's eyes and never looking away, wanting to make him certain of what he was saying, to let him know that he meant it. Clint nodded a little, and Coulson relaxed.

"I really like you Clint. I've liked you for a long time, and it's not going to change. What I want to do now, if you'll let me, is take a nice long shower with you, and wash you, and kiss you, and hold you close." Coulson knew with Clint that honesty was always best. If he lied,

at all, it was likely Clint would close up and stop talking. So instead he told him the truth, and gave him time to decide how to react.

There was hesitation still in Clint's eyes, but he hadn't looked away, and he nodded silently, reaching for his hand.

"I..." He nodded, and leant up to kiss him softly. "I don't know if that's something I want to do. But I want to try it."

"That's good enough for me Clint..." Coulson answered, kissing him. "That's all I could ask for."

Clint got out from the bed and reached for his hands.

"So. Shower..."

Chapter 17: In Each Other's Clothes

Chapter Summary

Clint and Coulson share a shower and Clint realises his clothes are in another room.

They stood together under the running water, and Clint kissed him softly, his hands exploring Coulson's body, running over his shoulders and down his chest. He hesitated, lingering over the angry red scar from his encounter with Loki, thinking what the god had nearly cost them both.

"It isn't your fault Clint." Coulson told him, as patiently as he could. He didn't blame Clint for a moment, but it was still hard to watch as he ate himself up with guilt at the smallest hint of what had happened. Clint nodded shakily, his hand trembling as he pressed it over the scar.

"You could have died."

"Yes. I could. And you could have died when you fell off that building, or when you jumped between windows, or when Hulk caught you. You could have died falling down the stairs this morning Clint. You could die. I could die. We're surrounded by fighting, and that means we will get hurt, we will get injured, and it might be serious. We can't just let it overtake our lives. We might die, but we can be stronger than that. We fight while we still can, and afterwards we do what we can to heal each other, to take away the pain of the scars and make sure that we can get back on our feet and continue fighting."

Clint looked up at him and nodded, hand running down over his side, grabbing the flannel and washing him gently. It would have been so easy to make the movements sexual, their bodies close together, but he remembered what it was that Coulson wanted. He was determined to try and give him that.

He kissed him softly, and turned him around, rubbing his hands over Coulson's back, easing away the tension and smiling to himself at the groans of pleasure his actions earned. He'd never enjoyed touching someone in this way, intimate beyond imagining but non-sexual, just touch for the sake of touch. He pressed a kiss between Coulson's shoulder blades, before reluctantly handing over the flannel, and letting his handler take care of him.

"There you go Clint... all clean..." Coulson informed him after a few minutes, but his hands lingered, as though he were as reluctant as Clint to break contact. Clint nodded, kissing him and turning away, switching off the water and grabbing a towel for himself before handing Coulson one in turn.

That done, he raced from the room, heading back into Coulson's bedroom, and going through Coulson's underwear drawer. He smirked, picking out a pair of boxers that were navy aside from the red and white waistband, marked with the Captain America shield, and pulling them

on. He glanced at himself in the mirror, and decided it looked good. He continued his search, picking up a pair of Coulson's smart work trousers from the closet, and fastening them around his waist. He could hear Coulson approaching, and just had time to throw on the "archers do it with a quiver" t-shirt from last night, with one of Coulson's smart white shirts over the top. He didn't try and do up the buttons - he was a physically broader man than his handler and he didn't want to ruin his clothing.

"Barton..." Coulson spoke, and the smirk in his voice was evident. "What are you wearing?" "Clothes."

"I can tell you're wearing clothes Clint. But those are my clothes."

"My clothes are in another floor, you don't want me wandering through the tower naked."

"No... I don't. But you had a perfectly good towel..."

Clint's face fell slightly, and Coulson squeezed his shoulder.

"What you can do though, is you can go and get a box of your clothes to put up here, and I can put some of mine in your room, and then we can avoid this unpleasant situation in future. And Clint...I like you wearing my clothes, I just was..." That was when Clint realised exactly how Coulson was looking at him. "I was just a little surprised, that's all. And Clint, in future? I do have a t-shirt and jeans of yours in that drawer there, in case you ended up staying around."

"Oh?" Clint smirked, going over to the indicated drawer and picking out the clothes, holding them up to Coulson. "Here you go."

"What?"

"I'm in your clothes. Go on."

Coulson rolled his eyes, but pulled them on, and Clint grinned, pressing a kiss to his cheek.

"Okay, yeh, you in my clothes is kinda nice, I can see why you like it."

"Great, now, Clint let's see if I can actually get my clothes back from you before you manage to stretch them." Coulson reached out for his shirt, but he certainly didn't sound annoyed.

"You just want to see me strip." Clint answered with a grin. "Do I at least get to keep the t-shirt?"

"I thought you liked me in the t-shirt."

"I do...uh..." Clint frowned, then yelped as Coulson threw a parcel at him and it hit him in the side of the head. It was quite a light parcel, but it was the principle of the thing. He looked down to find that he had been hit by a grey shirt, still in its polythene wrapper.

"I thought you might want one too. You can wear it and annoy Natasha."

"Annoying Natasha is a bad idea."

"You can get away with it. Now. Clothes."

Clint laughed, but he removed the shirt and t-shirt, throwing both at Coulson's head. A moment later, the trousers followed them.

"Really Clint? That pair of underwear?" Coulson asked, despair obvious in his voice. Clint just smirked at him and nodded.

"Yeh. These I like. And you don't have any of my underwear in your room, so I'm keeping them..." With that, he pulled on the rest of his clothes. "Now, I'm going to go and get a bag of

stuff for your room, I'll be back shortly for yours, then you can do paperwork and I'll hit the range..."

"Actually..." Coulson stepped up close to Clint, running his hand over his body so that his hand rested on the waistband of his boxers. "I thought I might join you, if you'd like..."

Chapter 18: Something Together

Chapter Summary

Coulson watches Clint shoot before having a go himself.

The range was Clint's environment, more than anywhere else. The vents might have been where he sheltered, where he hid, but on the range he wasn't afraid, he was relaxed. He was comfortable there.

Coulson couldn't stop himself from admiring Clint. This, at least, hadn't been tainted by Loki's actions. Clint belonged here, as much now as he ever had, and he was relaxed. Watching Clint ready his bow was beautiful, as much of a dance as when he and Natasha sparred, but with something closer to worship.

Clint had bows that readied themselves automatically, but when he was shooting for fun, at his own pace, he preferred to string his bow. Coulson watched as he slotted the limbs in place, then strung it, using his foot to hold it down, pulling it at an angle so that he could slip the string in place. Only when the bow was ready did he pick up his quiver, filling it with arrows.

Today it was nothing fancy. Simple arrows, aimed at the target Stark had constructed for him. He fitted an arrow onto the string, and then brought the bow up, his body settling naturally into its stance. He closed one eye, staring at the target as he brought the string up to brush against his face. He held steady for a moment, body tense, straining against the power of the weapon in his hands, and then released it, letting it fly straight into the tiny yellow circle at the very centre of the target.

Coulson watched in silent awe, seeing a different side to Clint from the confident joker on comms, or the quiet and frightened man he had seen so much of recently. This was different. This was Clint as a soldier, Clint doing what he did best, what he lived for.

As arrow after arrow struck the target, Coulson watched in amazement, worshipping the man before him. It wasn't anything sexual. It wasn't just that Clint looked beautiful at that moment, like something from ancient pottery, or even the calm look on his face in the moment after he let his arrow fly. It was the way Clint was here. Serene. That was the best way that Coulson could describe it, a word that would never otherwise be used for the archer. He was at that moment calm, and relaxed, and truly beautiful with it.

"You're staring." Clint told him, but there was no shame there, and no teasing either. Just an acceptance.

"You're beautiful." Coulson answered. "I can't take my eyes away."

Clint snorted a little, and Coulson was kind enough to pretend that he couldn't see the slight hint of colour across his face. What happened next though surprised the older man. Clint leaned back a little, looking straight at him, and shot off another bullseye without turning his head.

"I think you should be able to shoot."

"I..." Coulson hesitated for a moment. With a gun, he shot passably well, but he hadn't tried with a bow and arrow before. He shrugged. "Sure, I'll give it a go."

Clint paused, holding out his bow, and Coulson approached, wrapping his fingers around the string the way Clint instructed.

"Okay, now pull it up to rest on your cheek..." Clint insisted, smiling as he did it. Coulson was trembling under the strain, and the string nearly slipped out of his hand.

Clint caught it, carefully easing the bow back to its resting position.

"It's bad for them if they get dry fired..." He explained, one hand absentmindedly petting the wood of his bow. "I'll string up one with a slightly lighter poundage, nothing wrong with that, just makes it a bit easier for you to control, okay?"

Coulson nodded, watching as Clint did so, hands still holding onto Clint's bow. The archer returned and took the bow from him, replacing it with a dark blue one.

"This is one I use sometimes when I need less power behind the shots..." He explained, fastening a quiver to Coulson's waist, taking the opportunity to run a hand over his thigh.

"Here..." He adjusted Coulson's stance, and stood close behind him, his hands resting on Coulson's own. He fitted an arrow, and Coulson fired. The arrow went over to the right, and Coulson flinched.

"Hey..." Clint smiled slightly, taking the bow from him. "Okay, hold your hands in front of you like this, so there's a little gap you can see through, great, now bring your hands up to your face so you can still see it."

"Okay..." Coulson obeyed his instructions, bringing his hand up to his face.

"Good." Clint nodded when the hands ended up against Coulson's left eye. "Thought so. You've got to shoot backwards." He swapped the hands Coulson was using and reversed his stance, before standing behind him once more. "There..."

The second arrow hit the target, even if it was some way from the centre, and Coulson found the bow didn't shake so much in his hands. It wasn't perfect, but he was happy with it for a first go. Clint loaded the second arrow.

"Try and get the arrows close together, once you've got a tight grouping you can move it around the target, your priority is getting them near each other..."

"Okay?" Coulson responded, releasing the string again. This arrow thudded midway between the first and the bullseye.

"You're improving." Clint told him smugly. "I'm a good teacher."

"You really are..." Coulson agreed, as Clint leant in to nuzzle against his shoulder. "You're the best."

"You deserve the best sir." Clint answered, hand running down Coulson's spine. "Now, try again."

Coulson did so, and pressed back against Clint.

"This is really intimate...I'd like to stand like this when you shoot, or maybe I can be the voice in your ear over comms while you practice..."

Clint gasped softly.

"Oh...I like that idea."

"Thought you might..." Coulson answered, letting another shot fly, and grinning as this one hit the blue.

"Let me..." Clint's hands fastened over his, and guided him through the next shot with utter precision. It sunk into the yellow.

Chapter 19: Formal Wear

Chapter Summary

Clint finds out about his next mission, and asks Tony for some assistance.

"What?" Clint asked, lying back on the sofa in Coulson's office, a grin on his face as he threw a pen from hand to hand. "You're kidding right."

"Apparently not." Coulson answered, looking down at the tablet in his hand with obvious disgust. "They seem to enjoy giving us the horrible missions at the moment."

"You steal Fury's eyepatch or something? I mean, I might have kinda sorta..."

"Clint."

"Shot his coffee mug. But he won't know it was me."

"Did you shoot it with an arrow?"

"Maybe."

"Clint, he's going to know it was you."

"Are you sure?"

"Absolutely." Coulson tapped his hands against the tablet. "It's security detail at a party that they think Hydra might have an interest in. A couple of the attendees have had threats made against them, and we don't want them to be killed."

Clint snorted slightly, but nodded.

"Tonight?"

"Tomorrow night. Which means you have time to get a suit."

"I have a suit..." Clint protested.

"No. Well. You do, but... it's not appropriate. We need you to look smart."

"Oh fun. I get to walk around like a penguin all night hoping something exciting happens."

Coulson let out a soft sigh, but he was smiling as he did it.

"No, you get to walk around all night like a penguin with me and hoping that nothing happens. Now, Stark has been begging for weeks to sort you out with a suit, so go and see him."

"You ..." Clint rolled his eyes but went down to the workshop, lingering for a moment at the glass doors.

He watched the scene within with a smile. Tony was focused on some project or other he was working on, in a battered t-shirt and ripped jeans. There was a giant grin on his face and he was coated in engine oil and smears of dirt.

Steve was sat nearby, watching Tony just as intently as Tony was watching the project, holding a sketchbook on his lap and drawing carefully, while Dummy moved between the two, passing Steve pencils and Tony wrenches (and occasionally pencils, when he got the

orders muddled up). It was almost hypnotising, and Clint could easily have lost track of the time he stood there before Steve glanced up and beckoned him in.

Clint walked in cautiously. "Hey... um. Tony. I could...do with some help actually, I need a suit, and I wondered if you could recommend..."

Tony didn't seem to hear, and when he looked up a moment later he frowned.

"Heya Clint, something bothering you?"

"He needs help with a suit." Steve supplied, sparing Clint the embarrassment of having to repeat the point at hand.

"Oh... well suits, suits I can do, when you say a suit do you mean an explodey type suit with metal and stuff or a suit suit for parties."

"For parties, I've got a security detail job."

"Oh fantastic." Tony grinned. "I'll go get cleaned up, don't worry Steve, you can finish that later with Dummy's help right?"

Clint grinned apologetically at Steve, but Steve didn't seem bothered, and Tony did indeed take him shopping.

The shopping itself was somewhere between fantastic fun and a horrific ordeal, and Clint wasn't quite sure how the two managed to combine so easily. Tony knew exactly what he wanted and exactly where to get it, but he was very determined to get it perfect, which meant it dragged on rather, with Clint acting as a clothes horse for what felt like hours.

Eventually though, it was done, and he took his smart suit back home.

"Come to the workshop..." Tony insisted, grabbing his hand and dragging him back down, handing him a couple of waistcoats that were smart, his own patterned with grey and purple leaves whilst the other had dark blue. "Bullet proof. Don't ask, I got bored and I wanted to make something."

Clint nodded his thanks, and took the clothes up to Coulson's room. He spent the night there, made breakfast for them both, and spent most of the morning at the range. He continued shooting until Coulson walked up behind him and wrapped his arms around his waist.

"We need to get ready."

Clint nodded, following him back to his room, and getting into the suit. It felt awkward and uncomfortable - they had found something that gave him a good range of movement, which he was grateful for, but it still felt unnatural to him. He shivered slightly as he stood there in the smart clothes, feeling more naked than he did when he was wearing nothing.

"Let me do your bow tie..." Coulson carefully wrapped it around the collar of his shirt, leaning in and kissing him gently, stroking his fingers over his side and leading him to a mirror. "You look incredible."

Clint stared at his reflection in shock. He certainly didn't look as terrible as he would have expected, and that was a relief. It was all down to Coulson, he was sure of it.

He nibbled his lip, looking from his own reflection to Coulson's, seeing them both in smart suits. They looked like any other couple.

"Sir, is this a mission or a date?"

"I see no reason why it can't be both." Coulson answered. "As long as we get the job done and make sure nothing bad happens..."

"I guess that means no drinking?"

"Yes. No drinking..." Coulson's hands rested on his waist, and his reflection gazed fiercely into Clint's eyes. "You need to be at your best Barton. Look, you get through tonight without any problem, and we can go back to a hotel, how does that sound..."

"Good." Clint grinned, brushing his lips against Coulson's and squeezing his hand.

"Thought it might."

The archer smirked and headed down to the waiting car that would take them to the party. Clint fiddled with the sleeves of his shirt as he waited, remembering how they had looked in the mirror. He glanced over at Coulson and nodded.

"Yeh. This is definitely a date."

Chapter 20: Dancing

Chapter Summary

The mission is carried out and Clint and Coulson move together.

Chapter Notes

Warnings: Non graphic violence and peril

"I suppose it can be a date." Coulson answered with a smile, holding open the door and walking into the ballroom beyond, one hand staying on Clint's waist throughout. They were here as a couple, and they would draw less attention if they stayed close throughout. He took a moment to admire the way Clint moved, the elegance of his body. Clint lacked the delicate feline grace of Natasha, but his was something else entirely, a strength and a beauty different from anything that Coulson had experienced before, and he was grateful to see it.

Clint was clearly in awe of their surroundings, looking around himself with wide eyes. Coulson couldn't stop smiling, reaching and gently squeezing Clint's shoulder, kissing him on the cheek.

"Relax and have fun..." He whispered, and then followed it by mentioning where the individuals they were guarding were. Clint nodded smartly, smiling at him and walking around the room for a little, before returning to Coulson's side and wrapping his arms around his waist.

"We should dance."

"Alright. Do you know how?"

"You saw me dancing at the club." Clint teased, reminding him of the last mission they had been sent on a few weeks back. Clint might have been able to pole dance or strip tease, but neither of those was particularly appropriate for present company.

"I'll teach you..."

Coulson reached out, resting a hand on Clint's waist, guiding Clint to rest his on Coulson's shoulder. Clint frowned.

"I'm not letting you lead."

Coulson laughed slightly, but conceded Clint's point, rearranging their bodies and whispering instructions, moving slowly with him. They didn't meet each other's eyes. They were both scanning the room, watching the other dancers and the bystanders, looking for anyone who could pose a potential threat and keeping an eye on where the possible victims were. They didn't want to alarm them or cause added problems by drawing additional attention, but at the

same time they didn't want to miss the potential risks or lose sight. Trying to act relaxed was the easiest way to balance those conflicting concerns, and the opportunities it provided for contact were simply an added bonus.

Coulson helped guide Clint around the room, enjoying the opportunity even if Clint's movements were a little stiff, a little awkward. It was worth it in the end, to be close to him, to have a moment to themselves.

He was absorbed in that thought when the shooting started.

In a flash, they both sprang into action, grabbing their guns from concealed pockets. "Get down!" Clint shouted at the party in general, racing over to the targets and hiding them behind a table, his gaze running around the room, whilst Coulson made his way to a pillar and sheltered behind it, shooting whenever the opportunity arose.

Coulson watched Clint, the sheer elegance and grace he moved with. He tried to cry out as a figure emerged from the shadows behind Clint, grasping him, but before he had the chance Clint had moved, flipping his opponent and attacking him, the crunch of broken bone ringing out across the room. There was near silence from the other guests, aside from a few who were panicking, and even at this distance and with the quiet level monotony of Clint's voice, Coulson could hear him threatening the attacker that had nearly got the better of him.

A sniper stepped out from behind the pillar opposite Coulson, aiming at Clint, and was felled by a shot before he had the opportunity to realise what was happening. The two of them found a different kind of dance, one they were far more used to, as they coordinated movements, Clint evacuating the targets to the waiting SHIELD van before doing the same for the other guests. Coulson watched carefully, letting Clint work, keeping an eye out for any attackers.

When the air filled with smoke, Coulson stumbled, breathing suddenly becoming hard, but he made himself stay upright, covering his mouth.

"Barton, hurry up on the evac, you can't breathe this stuff. They're looking for you."

"Help me get everyone out of here!" Clint shouted back. "Coulson, you can't see what you're doing so help. Go over on the other side!"

Together, they helped to empty the hall, herding as many people as were possible into the waiting arms of SHIELD custody. Only once they had done all they could did they meet, clasping their hands tightly and heading out of the building and into the dark night beyond.

After the choking atmosphere of the ball, Coulson couldn't stop himself from taking deep and thankful breaths, trying to relax. Beside him, Clint was grinning.

"I think I liked that kind of dancing more."

"You would." Coulson answered, but he was smiling.

"We did it." Clint responded quickly, deciding to focus on the positives.

"We did." Coulson agreed, smiling softly. "You knew we would."

"You're a good man Phil."

"I'm not the only one Clint..." Coulson answered with a smirk.

"Now, do we have a report to do?"

"Yes, but it will take less than an hour. Then we have a hotel room."

"Fantastic."

The report ended up taking much less than an hour, thanks to Clint being at his most distracting and Coulson being reluctant to ignore him for too long. Once he had pressed the button to submit the initial form, and sealed the paper copy away safely, Coulson turned his attention fully onto Clint.

"You're smiling."

"Of course I'm smiling." Clint answered with a shrug. "We're in a hotel room. Now. Bed..."

He grabbed Coulson's hands, and pulled him to bed, stripping of his clothes. Coulson mirrored his actions, pressing gentle kisses to Clint's collarbone, smirking at the way the archer's breath hitched at the pressure to his throat. He could certainly get used to this.

"You look beautiful Clint." He told him, running his hands down Clint's body.

"So do you..." Clint pushed him back onto the bed and moved over him, fumbling on the cabinet for the lube and preparing himself before sinking down over Coulson's body with a groan, gazing into his eyes.

Coulson rocked his hips, finding a rhythm that suited both of them, and never looking away from the ecstasy written across Clint's face. They moved together in the most natural dance of all, and when it was over they held each other close and slept.

Chapter 21: The Breakup

Chapter Summary

Clint has another nightmare, and when Coulson suggests therapy he panics.

Chapter Notes

This fic will have a happy ending, but this is not a happy chapter, and nor will tomorrow's be.

Coulson woke up slowly in the warmth of the hotel room, wrapping his arms tightly around the sleeping archer, trying to shield him as he rested. For Clint though, the arms which tightened around him didn't feel like a safe space, not right now. They felt like a prison, like a trap, and he froze, losing track of where and who he was.

It wasn't his bedroom, he knew that. The fabric beneath him felt unfamiliar and the very air in the room tasted wrong. He was drifting between sleep and wakefulness, and he knew he was in a trap.

He felt a cold ball of fear lodge itself in his heart as he began to piece together his idea of where he was. The arms around him felt warm, but that could be an illusion. After he'd spilled every one of his secrets to Loki, the monster had taken great joy in using the information against him. Coulson had been easy to use to hurt Clint, because Clint had still cared for him, had still retained the memories. They had been easy to twist, to use, and Clint had always wanted to have Coulson's attention. Loki's illusions had given him that, and had destroyed it. He began to panic, trying not to move, hoping he could focus for a few more seconds on the real Coulson, not on this hollow copy that Loki was using to torment him.

"Clint?" The voice in his ear sounded concerned and real, a perfect mockery of who Coulson was. It sounded as though he was caring, like he was wanting to look after Clint, and that frightened him. He couldn't handle that. He thrashed out, tumbling from the bed and landing on the floor in a heap, staring up at the ceiling and panting, before scrambling back under the bed.

"Clint?" Coulson's voice followed him, and he saw the man crouching by the bed, not making any attempt to follow him, just calling out towards him and then giving him time. Clint was glad for that. Normally the Loki-shadows would chase him, but today it was different. He looked into his eyes.

"Clint, I know you're scared right now but I promise that it is safe. You need to get out of there, but I'm not going to hurt you. I'm going to make it alright."

Clint looked at him, and then his eye caught the bullet proof waistcoat from the previous night lying on the floor. He remembered it. This... This wasn't an illusion.

"You're real."

"I'm real. Please Clint, come out... these...these nightmares are destroying you. They're going to ... Clint..." Coulson's voice sounded so patient, so kind, and so gentle that it turned Clint's stomach. "I really think you need to go to therapy Clint. You've been through so much, and I think it would help."

"You don't want to help me." Clint spat, curling back further under the bed, still trying to work out what was real and what wasn't. "You just want to be able to use me."

"No, Clint... I ...I want to help you. I want to help, but I can't do this all by myself. You need more help than I can give..." And there was pain in Coulson's eyes, and he wanted to make that leave. He hated knowing that he was going to hurt Coulson, that his actions, the fear he couldn't overcome were upsetting his lover.

"You think I'm broken." He whispered, his voice trembling a little, hardly hearing Coulson's quiet reply, not looking into his eyes. Coulson was saying that he wasn't broken, just damaged, just in need of help, but to Clint that sounded exactly like being broken.

He squirmed out from under the bed, but kept his gaze on the floor, shrugging away Coulson's hand when he reached out for him.

"I can't." He whispered. "I can't go to therapy. If you can't put up with me as I am..." He hesitated, and his voice shook. "You shouldn't have to put up with me. I'm going home..." He swallowed, licking his lips. "I'll be on missions, but...I need time. Don't come after me." He pulled on his clothes and walked out of the room.

He was unsurprised when Coulson didn't follow him, even though he was disappointed. He wasn't worth Coulson's time, and he had always known that. He stumbled slightly, heading back to the tower, trying to push back the memories of the previous night. In a different life, maybe he would have deserved Coulson, maybe they could have made it work. But after what Loki had done, after what so many had done, he wasn't worth Coulson's attention.

He made his way up to his room, and curled up in the wardrobe, his head buried in his knees, having given JARVIS strict instructions that no one was allowed inside. It was only another a couple of moments before Natasha pushed the door to his room open, and made her way into his room. She knocked on the wardrobe door, knowing where it was that Clint tended to hide. "I'm coming in Clint..."

He shuffled up and let her join him, gaze down.

"What happened pigeon?"

He shrugged, not even managing a weak smile at her question.

"Tell me Clint."

"He wants me to go to therapy. He thinks I'm broken."

"You have a nightmare?" She asked gently, and he nodded.

"I thought he was one of Loki's projections." Clint whispered, and she swore softly in Russian, wrapping her arms around him. "You going to make me go?"

"It's not my place to tell you what to do pigeon. I just need you to know that I'm always here for you..." She answered, not judging him, not forcing him, just doing what she could, as she always did.

"I'm lucky to have you Tasha..."

"I know you are. But you've got me..." She held him, and her fingers ran through Clint's hair. He fell forwards against her, body shaking with sobs, knowing he'd probably just lost the best thing he ever had had. She didn't shush him, just held him gently, not judging, keeping him safe.

Coulson sat alone in the hotel room, gazing at the door. He took a deep breath and got to his feet, knowing he had to head into work. He would see Clint later.

Chapter 22: In Battle

Chapter Summary

Clint is drifting around the tower, only appearing for missions, while Coulson wonders what he has done wrong.

Chapter Notes

Warnings: Canon appropriate violence and peril

Clint drifted around the tower like a ghost, with his head down, not talking, and everyone was concerned. Clint made it clear he didn't want to talk, and that meant people came to talk to Coulson instead, which was the last thing he wanted.

Coulson tried to smile, to say that things would be okay, and to emphasize that this wasn't Clint's fault, but it hurt. He wanted Clint back, but he knew he needed help and he didn't think he could provide it. His bed felt cold when he woke in it alone.

"He just needs time." Natasha announced as she dropped down from the ceiling to sit on his desk. "Don't... don't rush him. Don't push him, he hates that. But don't abandon him either." Natasha spoke gently, calmly, explaining it as though this was something easy, something natural. Coulson nodded, and smiled at her slightly, and thanked her, and waited for her to leave.

He met with Fury and Hill for drinks like he normally did on a Tuesday evening, but even that didn't relax him. He watched how naturally the two of them talked, and he felt frustration and anger directed towards himself bubbling away inside. Because he and Clint should have been sharing moments like this.

"How is he?" Fury asked softly, bringing Coulson back to reality and making him realise he hadn't spoken for the last ten minutes.

"Surviving." He answered, staring blankly, then managing a false smile. "He has his team around him. That's the best we could hope for."

"You're not on your own Phil..." Hill reached out and squeezed his hand. "You aren't. And in time, you'll sort this out."

Coulson nodded, and tried to follow the conversation. He kept replaying the image of Clint walking out of the hotel room in his mind, wondering if he should have called him back. He felt lost, completely, and he knew Clint would be feeling the same. But every time he thought

of going to see him, Natasha would appear, and stop him. He began to wonder whether she was psychic, or if she was just stalking him.

The only time Coulson caught a glimpse of Clint was when the entire team assembled to fight threats, and even then Clint was subdued. "You think I'm broken" just kept echoing around Coulson's mind. Clint thought Coulson didn't want him, and he couldn't get the chance to prove to him he was wrong.

"Agent Barton, report." Coulson commanded on the comms, waiting for that voice. The battle had been raging for almost an hour now, and Clint had to be running low on arrows even with the new system Stark had designed. This wasn't good. "Barton. Report."

"There's a fresh wave of the smaller robots coming sir, but Cap just finished off the last giant robotic hamster, so it could be worse."

"Thank you Barton. Romanoff?"

"Civilians are evacuated from the area sir, and Stark and I have got through most of the code." Natasha answered, the sound of her fingers flying over the keys audible in the background. Coulson smiled and continued.

"Captain?"

"Alright for now here sir, managed to find a suitable vantage point."

"Thor?"

"All is well son of Coul."

"Stark?"

"I'm doing fine Agent, I'm awesome, and yep, I'm in through the code."

Coulson didn't bother attempting to check in with Hulk. He could see from his own vantage point on top of a building where Hulk was, and that he was doing relatively well against the swarm. He relaxed a little.

"Alright, regroup..." Steve called out and the group moved closer together. Coulson watched it play out before him, listening to the chatter of the team, and the information Clint provided.

There was a quietness to him today which was unusual, but he was still providing useful intelligence. That gave Coulson hope, because even if Clint didn't want to talk to him, he was still talking to his team, still taking part in their missions. He tried to focus on that, rather than on the distance and reluctance he was faced with when he tried to talk to Clint. He wondered whether the nightmares had stopped, but he was fairly sure that they were still carrying on, still haunting him.

Coulson couldn't see much of the battle from where he was. He could see Hulk's form, and occasionally managed to spot flashes of either Tony or Thor as they flew past, but otherwise he relied on the cameras that he had managed to hack, and the sounds of the team on comms. It wasn't ideal, but it gave him an adequate picture of what was happening. He scanned the feeds in front of him, checking for threats, his gaze lingering on the sight of Clint perched on a rooftop, shooting at a large robot that was bounding towards him.

He glanced away from the screen, but looked back when he heard a loud crack followed by Tony swearing.

"What the fuck was that..."

"Cap, I'm sorry." That was Clint, and his voice was shaking slightly. "Think my perch is going down."

Coulson opened his mouth to protest, but before he could say anything the air was filled with a horrific creak, as the building Clint was trying to shoot from crumpled beneath him. The group fell silent, all watching transfixed as the perch tumbled forwards, sweeping Clint up in the dust and debris, landing over him, leaving him invisible amongst the remains of the building.

"Agent Barton. Report." Coulson demanded, staring at the pile of rubble. Natasha or maybe Tony did something and the robots all fell still, but Coulson barely noticed. His gaze was fixed on the screen that had shown Clint a moment before. "Barton. Report." He could hear that his voice sounded frantic, verging on hysterical, but he didn't know how else he could possibly react. "Clint."

The comm remained silent, as slowly the rest of the team came to life, all heading towards the pile of rocks to try and search for him, to dig Clint out if he was trapped in it. "Barton. Report."

Chapter 23: Argument

Chapter Summary

Clint wakes up in a hospital bed, and is surprised to find he has company.

Chapter Notes

Warnings: mentions of past abuse and violence

For Clint, things were simple. He had been waiting for a shot, aware he was running low on arrows, and then his perch had given way. He had fallen, and his leg had been agony, and then there was nothing until he woke up in medical, to find his leg in plaster and Coulson sat by his side. He had missed the frantic search, the shouting, the days of patient vigil as they waited to discover if he had pulled through. For the others, things had been much more complicated.

When Clint opened his eyes, the presence of the older agent confused him. Over the past few weeks, Coulson had been actively avoiding him, and Clint had understood that, but his sudden return was a shock. He stayed quiet, watching him, laying still and trying to feign sleep.

"I know you're awake Clint." Coulson informed him after a couple of minutes, his voice infinitely patient and calm.

"What's it matter?" Clint muttered, opening his eyes to stare at the man. He was shocked at the pained expression on Coulson's face at his words.

"It matters, because for the last three days we haven't been sure whether or not you were going to wake up. Because I thought I might have lost you forever. I wasn't ready for that." His voice didn't waver, was still so patient that it stung, but Clint could sense the emotions buried beneath it. It sounded as though Coulson had been frightened even, worried that he might have lost Clint. Clint wasn't sure how to respond to that fear, couldn't hope to understand it, but still tried to smile, to make sense of it.

The drugs they had given him were strong, but not enough to stop his thoughts, and he quickly realised that Coulson had been worried about the prospect of losing him. Which in turn meant that Coulson didn't want to lose him.

"Oh." He whispered, and watched as his handler nodded once. He hadn't expected that, but it seemed it was what had happened, even with him trying to act against it. Coulson hadn't wanted to lose Clint. Clint realised with a sinking feeling in his gut that he didn't want to lose

Coulson either. He regretted walking away from him in that hotel room, regretted spoiling what could have been an incredible night with his own fears.

Loki still had power over him, Clint realised with a twinge of pain and regret. He didn't want that to be the case. He wanted to be free from the god but he wasn't. He was trapped. He belonged to the god that haunted his nightmares, that wouldn't let him go, and had taken him forcefully, used him completely. He was still Loki's. He was broken. He shuddered, and around him the machines beeped out in alarm.

"Calm down Clint. Please. It's safe."

"Loki..." Clint panted, feeling his skin crawl, aware he was sweating but not knowing how to stop.

"Loki is gone." Coulson's hand fell on his shoulder, and at that moment Clint had an anchor back to reality. The depth of fear which a moment previously had threatened to overwhelm him totally now hung back a little, gnawing at the edges of his mind but kept at bay by that strong hand on his arm, and the knowledge that he wasn't helpless now.

Coulson's voice was strong and it cut through the air, chasing away the nightmares that might otherwise overwhelm him.

"Loki is gone. Loki is gone, and I am here. It's over Clint."

Clint nodded, and the fear receded. He frowned, remembering more recent events.

"The battle. Did we win?"

"We won. They got through the coding and turned them off, and Steve tracked down the idiot that was controlling them." Coulson supplied. "But your perch crumbled, and a lot of masonry landed on top of you. It shattered your leg, broke your pelvis and you have some terrible bruising. They think your leg might be repairable, but if so it will take a while."

"I can go on missions without a leg."

"You'll be in danger if you need to move quickly Clint..." Coulson sighed. "We'll see. For now we just need to get you better."

"I'm fine."

"Clint, you have a lot of broken bones. You are not fine. And that's not the main problem. Clint, honestly, have you been sleeping? You could normally have got off that in time."

"If you're implying I've been risking the safety of the team-"

"I'm implying that you were risking your own safety Clint. You have to be careful. Please. Just... have you slept?"

Clint bowed his head slightly and shrugged.

"What the fuck does it matter? I've been doing my job."

"Clint, you need sleep."

"I can't... I can't sleep, okay? I could sleep before, when you were around, but now you aren't and I can't because every time I close my eyes I think that Loki will be there, or that you will be gone, or that..." words failed him and he shuddered. "Look, I'm sorry if I'm not as awake as you want me. I'm going through a rough patch."

"I want you back Clint. If we don't have a relationship, that's alright, but at least let me look after you. At least let me guard you so that you have a chance of getting some sleep. Please."

Clint looked up at Coulson, and saw the sincerity in his eyes. He hesitated a moment longer, and then nodded.

"I'm...I'm sorry. I'm sorry that I left, and that I can't sleep, and that I'm a fuck up. I'm sorry that I let you down. But I can't... I can't face everyone knowing how broken I am. I can't have you knowing how broken I am. I can't face people deciding I'm a risk, that I can't stay on the team."

Coulson's lips thinned slightly, and he rested a hand on Clint's shoulder.

"Alright. Clint, what I want is for you to try and talk to me. About how you're feeling. About why you can't sleep. It's not ideal, but it's... it might help you, and if you can do that, I think it would be a good start."

"I won't have to talk to psych?"

"You might. I'm going to try and help you for now, but if I can't do enough, if you need more than I can manage, you will have to. And if I can't handle what you're saying, or I can't say the right thing? Then I'm going to go to talk to them, do you understand? We can try this, but I'm not making any promises."

Clint nodded, and he lent over, brushing his lips against Coulson's. Coulson squeezed his hand and stroked his hair, letting Clint cuddle into the touch.

"For what it's worth Clint, none of the team are going to let you get kicked off. They all want you there, they all need you there and they all think you're amazing. They've been keeping watch with me, they just went for dinner. They'll be happy you're awake. Just something to think about."

Clint felt a slight smile play over his lips as he allowed the drugs to lull him back into sleep.

Chapter 24: Making Up

Chapter Summary

Coulson is relieved to have Clint back, and can't wait to take him home.

Chapter Notes

Warnings: sexual activity

Coulson couldn't put into words what it felt like when Clint's eyes flickered open. There was joy, of course there was joy - Clint was alive. But there was something else as well, a confusion or a hope. Because the look in Clint's eyes when he looked at him didn't imply that he wanted Coulson out of his life forever.

He reached for his hand and spoke to him, and kept a constant vigil at his bedside, leaving only when another Avenger was with Clint. He refused to run the risk of Clint waking up alone, not when he was so fragile. He was exhausted by maintaining guard, but it was worth it to prove to Clint that he was worth something, that he was cared about. He had been given a second chance, and he wouldn't let it slip through his fingers.

As Clint began to recover physically, going from stable to improving, Coulson started to focus on the mental injuries. He had to be careful. He had to be so careful. He knew that one misstep could send Clint skittering away back to the nightmares, and destroy any progress that they had made. But he kept trying. Clint was worth that.

He brought Clint food that Bruce had smuggled into medical, refusing to give him canteen food now that he had improved enough to eat. Clint grinned.

"Thanks Coulson."

"It's alright. Thought you deserved a reward for getting better, and hospital food is a punishment."

The smile that graced Clint's lips then was fleeting, but it was an echo of the Clint from before and Coulson cherished it.

"You're staring."

"You smiled. I'm allowed to stare."

Clint rolled his eyes and opened his mouth to answer, but Coulson didn't give him a chance, leaning in to kiss him softly. He only brushed his lips against Clint's, ready to move away if Clint didn't want him to, but Clint's hands reached up and grabbed the lapels of his jacket, pulling him closer, and Coulson felt he had to oblige.

The kiss didn't last long as Clint needed to pause for air, but for Coulson it meant that there was a chance for him. He reached out to squeeze Clint's hand.

"Are we good?"

"Yeh." Clint grinned. "We're good."

It was that simple. Coulson's expression didn't betray the wave of relief that ran through him at that. He didn't want to frighten Clint away again. The next few days were easier, and soon Clint was cleared to go home. Admittedly, part of that was because he had managed to acquire enough office supplies to make a small bow, which he was using to harass the staff. Coulson didn't really approve, but at the same time he was just glad for the chance to take him home and so he didn't comment on it.

Taking Clint home was a difficult affair - the cast that Clint had been given for now held his leg rigid. In another week it would be replaced with one that would allow it to be bent, but for now Clint was stuck and so they had to walk home, Clint hopping on the crutches and leaning on Coulson for support.

When they got home they were surrounded by the rest of the team, who were all delighted to see Clint again. Natasha punched him in the arm.

"Hey!"

"If you don't want to get punched, you shouldn't let buildings fall on top of you."

Clint clearly couldn't think of an answer to that, so just pulled the spy into a tight hug. Coulson stood back, allowing the team to greet him, watching as they talked and as Bruce prepared a meal for the 'family'. They ate all standing at the breakfast bar in a show of solidarity with Clint.

"Would you like to watch a movie?" Steve suggested, only to be prodded in the chest by Tony. He looked blank, and Tony rolled his eyes.

"Steve. He would have to stand the entire time. And he has just got out of hospital, and been released into the care of the guy he is dating, and who he had been giving the cold shoulder to for weeks before the accident. They've made up now. I am absolutely certain that the last thing Clint or Agent want to do right now is watch a movie."

"Oh..." Steve blushed a little, ducking his head and then smiling. "Another time then?"

"Another time sounds good." Clint answered. "But Tony makes a good point." He grinned, reaching for Coulson and getting his help to leave the room. When they were alone, he frowned slightly. "This isn't going to be in the least bit dignified, is it?"

"We could wait..." Coulson suggested patiently, sure that Clint wouldn't approve of his suggestion in the least.

"No." Clint proved Coulson right. "We are not waiting. I'll just lie there. You're a smart guy, work with it."

Coulson grinned, nipping Clint's lip.

"Oh, don't worry, I can do that." He helped Clint up to their room, leaning back against the door when it was closed and kissing him gently, running his hands up Clint's sides. "I can definitely do that..."

Clint groaned against his lips, and Coulson nibbled at the soft skin, stroking his hands back up and taking Clint's shirt with them, pulling it over his head and dropping it down onto the

floor before delving back down to kiss at his neck, hands undoing his trousers but not pushing them down until after he had manoeuvred Clint back onto the bed, sliding the clothing over the cast.

Then he stepped back, making sure Clint's eyes were on him as he undressed, carefully placing his clothes to the side.

"How come my clothes get thrown on the floor and yours get put down neatly?"

"Because I wanted you naked and I wanted you to wait."

"No fair." Clint pouted, but he was grinning with it. Coulson rolled his eyes and then settled so that he was straddling Clint, gazing down into his eyes.

"Watch..." He spoke gently, picking up a tube from the nightstand and slicking his fingers, arching his head as he prepared himself. Clint didn't look away, and Coulson shivered at that. There was something beautiful about being the focus of Clint's attention at a moment like this.

Clint moaned.

"Stop teasing. I want you."

"Alright..." Coulson spread his fingers inside himself a final time, then moved down, slowly sinking onto Clint's cock with a groan. He gazed down at him as Clint's hand lifted to wrap around Coulson's length, rocking slowly against him. Below him, Clint was panting in pleasure, and he looked incredible. He was Coulson's again. The older man sped up, moving faster over him as their cries grew louder, before he climaxed, continuing to move until he felt Clint release inside him.

He pulled away and kissed him, getting a tissue to clean the two of them, and then lying down beside Clint, resting his head on Clint's shoulder and running his hand over the leg that was free of a cast.

"I don't want to lose you." He whispered against Clint's ear.

"You won't."

Chapter 25: Adjusting

Chapter Summary

Clint never thought he'd have a family, and at times the one he has is infuriating. But he thinks he could get used to it.

Clint found the entire 'family' thing weird. He'd never before had anything he could class as a home, or anyone he could consider a family. He was willing to make an exception for Natasha, but Natasha was different. It wasn't like they were siblings, not exactly. They were just two sides of the same blade. They fought together, lived together and laughed together, but they weren't like this.

There had never been arguments over whose turn it was to do the washing up, never been late night movie marathons and popcorn fights. Coulson had despaired of the two of them, but that had been because they were hard to look after in a different way, and not because they were difficult like the Avengers were. But he was slowly coming to accept that he wasn't alone any more.

It didn't mean that not being alone was always a positive thing. There were times that his team mates drove him insane. But he was beginning to realise that they had their good points.

Like when Tony woke Coulson and he early the morning after he had come home from hospital by knocking on their door.

"What?" Clint groaned, pulling the blankets up around both of them as best as he could with his injured leg, whilst Coulson lifted a taser from the nightstand.

"s Tony."

"Tony. What are you doing awake at seven in the morning?"

"I haven't slept yet." Tony replied, making Coulson turn his eyes skyward.

"Of course not. Fine. Come in."

The door opened smoothly and Tony stood there, bouncing a little on the balls of his feet as he looked at the two of them.

"You do both know you aren't wearing clothes?"

"We weren't expecting visitors." Coulson pointed out.

"Ah. Okay. Well anyway, Clint, I made you a present..." He stepped out of the way of the doorway, reached behind him and pulled in a wheelchair.

"Huh?" Clint asked eloquently, staring at the dark grey seat with purple wheels.

"I thought we should get you something while you're healing. It'll work better with the new cast, but look... it's steered by this gear stick, and you can put the bow there and the arrows

there, and I've built in a bit in the base to store more arrows, and an automatic feeder mechanism. It'll fly too. Well, hover. At least that way you won't fall off any more buildings."

Clint grinned.

"Thanks Tony."

"It's fine. I was bored, thought you deserved a present." Tony answered with a shrug. "It'll last while you're injured."

"Does that mean I can go on missions?"

"No." Coulson interrupted firmly. Clint shrugged and then grinned.

"Thanks Tony. Really."

"It's alright. Didn't want you stuck there for the next few weeks. I think Tasha's looking to spar with you..."

Clint groaned, and fell back on the bed, but didn't take his eyes off the chair.

It worked even better than Tony had implied, and Clint found it invaluable for getting around the tower, especially once his leg had healed enough for him to be given a moving cast. Clint still hated being stuck, but it was an improvement on what it could have been. He still kept up a tally of how many days it was until the cast was removed, but he didn't hate it the way he had hated previous casts. He spent time shooting, and challenging Dummy to races, and sitting with Coulson while they worked. He was still new at this whole family thing, but he hoped he might get the time to get the hang of it.

He made his way to the kitchen one afternoon after spending a couple of hours at the range, having been told by Jarvis that Coulson was there preparing dinner. He looked through the doorway to find that whilst he was indeed preparing dinner, he wasn't preparing it alone. Bruce and Steve were both with him, all focused on the cooking.

"Can I help?" Clint asked, and accepted the offered vegetable peeler, raising the height of the chair so that he could see what he was doing. He looked down at the potatoes, and told himself that if he did mess this up, he wasn't going to be in trouble. Only once he was sure about that did he reach for one of them.

The meal, when it was finished, was a success, full of shouting and laughter and noise and a sense of belonging. Clint sat between Coulson and Natasha, seeing the quiet smiles that passed between Steve and Tony, and the way that his friend was a little closer than necessary to Doctor Banner. He had never for a moment imagined that he might belong somewhere, but that was the case here.

Coulson seemed to notice. Throughout the meal he'd been closer than he normally was, and he squeezed Clint's hand gently. When the dessert (chocolate fudge cake) had been finished to widespread praise and quite a bit of mess, he left the others to tidy up and took Clint's hand in his.

"Clint, can you come with me please?"

"Sure." Clint answered with a shrug. He'd have gone anywhere if Coulson had asked him too, so he was surprised that Coulson sounded hesitant.

The reason for the hesitancy wasn't something he discovered until they were both out on the balcony, Clint sat in his chair whilst Coulson stood beside him, staring out over the city at the kind of view that Clint had never dreamed of being able to afford. He was distracted by it for a moment, and so only looked back at Coulson when his hand was squeezed. Coulson was kneeling before him, holding out a box - inside which there was a solid gold ring on a chain. "Clint... I want to be able to spend the rest of my life with you, no matter how long or short that may be. Would you ..." For a second, Coulson's voice stumbled. "Would I be wrong in thinking that you feel the same?" Clint shook his head. "Then would you do me the honour of being my husband?"

Clint stared down at Coulson in shock. This just didn't happen to him, this wasn't how his life went. He was so surprised he didn't respond until he saw the hope in Coulson's eyes fade slightly.

"I'd like that." He reached for the necklace.

"It's... so it doesn't catch when you're shooting."

"Thanks..." Clint ran his fingers over the chain, and then over the ring, before slipping it over his head. A few minutes ago he never would have imagined wearing it, and now he couldn't imagine ever taking it off.

Chapter 26: Birthdays

Chapter Summary

It is Clint's birthday, and despite the archer's quiet demeanor, Coulson and the team are determined that he'll have a good time.

For Coulson, his own birthday was just another day of the year, and more often than not he would be working on it. He didn't care about it - he didn't have to. His earlier birthdays had been filled with cake and presents and parties and the knowledge that he was wanted, and so they no longer held much significance to him.

For Clint, his birthdays mattered. He had no happy childhood memories, no recollections of laughter and sweets and pleasant company. So he clung to the days he had now, the reminder that things had changed from how they once were, and that he was no longer stuck in the past. He wasn't demanding, didn't expect hundreds of presents, and was happy just to get a card or a small cupcake. But he needed the day to be marked, to have his existence acknowledged. Coulson was not going to deny him that.

Clint needed his birthday to go well, and Coulson would not let him down. That was what Coulson had to have faith in, because this was too important to do badly.

As Clint's birthday approached, the archer became more nervous. His cast was still in place, but physio said that he was healing well, and it wouldn't be long until he improved enough that it could be removed, but Clint didn't seem overjoyed at the news. He was happy about it, but not overwhelmingly so.

It got to the point where Clint was reluctant to even mention his birthday, whilst Coulson carefully and slowly tried to coax Clint into talking about what he wanted. Clint shrugged and left Coulson to sort out everything.

"Why aren't you talking to Coulson pigeon?" Natasha asked, sitting beside Clint and resting a hand on the cast. "Not having cold feet about the wedding are you?"

Clint laughed and shook his head.

"Nat..." He rested his hand on top of her own. "Marrying Coulson is going to be the best thing that ever happened to me, tying with meeting him and meeting you. I'm not going to throw that away over being nervous. I'm not..."

"Then what is it pigeon?"

"He keeps asking me what I want for my birthday. But when I tell him, he looks disappointed."

"Oh?" Natasha tilted her head a little, her body language gently encouraging Clint to talk to her. Clint couldn't fight the suggestion even if he had wanted to.

"I tell him I just want him there. That I'd like the whole.... the whole team there, and maybe we could have a meal, I'm happy to cook, and then I can curl up against him..." He shrugged a little. "I mean, I told him that and he nearly looked angry. I don't know what I did wrong." "You did nothing wrong pigeon." Natasha reassured him. "I just need to go and talk to them. Don't worry, no one is going to get hurt."

Clint let her go and tried to push all thoughts of his birthday from his mind. Everyone else seemed to have forgotten which made things easier. No one mentioned it at all for the next week, and Clint didn't mind. He had been hopeful, but he just wanted a day with the team, and a day like any other would certainly be enough for him. He himself had nearly forgotten about his birthday when the day rolled around.

Coulson watched Clint with concern. He understood the day was hard for him, but it was still undeniably sad that he would have such simple wishes when it came to his birthday. On the day itself, he woke Clint gently with kisses, smiling down at him.

"Good morning..."

Clint's eyes lit up, and Coulson brushed his lips against Clint's ear.

"Happy birthday."

"You remembered..." Clint answered with a smile that was so happy Coulson's heart hurt. He nodded, ruffling Clint's hair. "Yeh. I remembered. Come on, the others will be waiting."

Clint got dressed, and made his way down to the living area, his hand grasping onto Coulson's. He was a little surprised to see the rest of the team already there.

"Sorry, am I late to a team meeting? I forgot to check."

"You're an idiot sometimes Legolas." Tony informed him with a grin. "It's your birthday. We've got presents for you. That's how birthdays work."

Clint shrunk back against Coulson's side for a moment, but then he smiled and nodded.

"Awesome, what did I get?" His gaze drifted to a pile of boxes on the table, wrapped in grey paper and tied with purple ribbons. "What are-"

"Those are yours." Natasha informed him, ushering him forwards to have a look.

"You have to open mine first because I got you two." Tony insisted, shoving a package into his hands. Clint unwrapped it, gasping to see a beautiful new bow there.

"Thank you Tony!" It made sense as a present – it would help him fight, mean he was useful for the team, but he was really grateful for it.

"You're welcome. Now these..."

Clint let Tony dictate the order that he opened the presents in, unwrapping them to find that they weren't all useful for work. Natasha had got him a first aid kit and a massage bar, which he appreciated, as he knew she only did practical presents. Thor supplied some Asgardian armour which looked like it cost more than everything Clint owned put together, but he tried not to worry about that as Thor was a prince and probably had it lying around spare.

It was when he got onto the rest of the presents that he was most surprised. Everyone else had got him gifts that were strictly for relaxing. From Bruce there were books about bird watching, with beautiful photographs, and a pair of binoculars.

"Even your eyes can't see everything Clint." He'd laughed at that, but put them carefully to

the side. Then from Coulson there were tickets for a holiday in Venice. They'd been there on a mission once, and Clint had said he loved the city. Clint held the tickets to his chest, looking up at him.

"The two of us?"

"Yes Clint, the two of us."

"But what about work?"

"I think that the world can survive without me for one week."

Clint grabbed Coulson's jacket and pulled him down to his chair, kissing him deeply and only moving away once Natasha cleared her throat loudly. Steve held out another present, with a nervous smile.

Clint opened it to find two paintings – a small one of the entire team, and a larger image of Coulson and himself standing together, a hawk wheeling in the sky overhead.

"It's beautiful..."

"Thanks. Phil helped me to decide what to paint." Steve answered. Clint just grinned, knowing how much Coulson must have enjoyed the chance to talk to his idol.

"Now, mine again." Tony insisted, holding out a box about the size of a kettle. Clint took it curiously, putting it on his lap to open it. He paused as he lifted the lid, and a soft mew came from the box.

Steve looked at Tony in mock horror.

"There weren't any air holes in that!"

"Doesn't need them." Tony answered with a shrug. Clint reached into the box, and picked out a small kitten, clearly one of Tony's creations, covered in silver armour. A small light glowed from where the collar tag would be. Clint ran a finger down the smooth metal back, and the creature leaned into it, a soft purr escaping.

"You can turn the sound off if you'd like. He's...well. He's yours. I thought you'd like a pet, and I know we might run off at any point to go and save the world but I don't want you worrying about a cat that might starve. So I made you a cat that can't starve. He's a learning robot, you can teach him tricks if you want. He could be used for surveillance and stuff, but for now I just..." Tony shrugged. "I thought it'd be nice."

"It's amazing. Thank you..." Clint sat the kitten down on his lap, petting it softly. He looked up at the entire team, blinking back the tears that threatened. "This...these were amazing. Really. I never..." He swallowed, then spoke again. "This is the best birthday ever."

"Of course it is." Tony answered. "You've got us."

"You do." Coulson confirmed, crouching down beside Clint to play with the cat. "And we're going to have your favourite dinner tonight, and I thought I'd take you out for lunch and for a walk in the park, unless there's anything you'd rather--"

"That sounds perfect." Clint answered and kissed his cheek. He had never dreamed his birthday could be this good.

Chapter 27: The Wedding

Chapter Summary

The big day approaches and Clint hopes all will go to plan.

Chapter Notes

Thanks to shadowhaloedangel for her help on the wedding scene.

Clint's cast was removed after his leg was healed, and he celebrated by crawling through the vents and generally making a nuisance of himself, much to the enjoyment of the rest of the team. They were glad he was back on his feet. With the date of the wedding rapidly approaching, Clint was relieved he would be able to walk down the aisle, but was sad to say goodbye to the flying wheelchair. He thought he might try it on a mission at some point. But not right now. He was just happy to be walking again.

Natasha celebrated the fact that her friend could walk again by beating him severely in a sparring match, leaving him bruised and aching, but both of them grinning at each other. "You got a dress picked out Barton?" She asked having pinned him to the ground on his front. "I'm wearing a suit Tasha." He answered. "Are you going to wear a dress for Banner?"

"We're not going to get married. We're just going to live in sin. And anyway, I wouldn't be in a dress." Natasha answered, and Clint laughed, squirming beneath her in an attempt to escape but knowing it was hopeless. Eventually, he had to tap out of the fight, getting to his feet once she moved away and panting to get his breath back.

The day of the wedding slowly came closer, and Clint tried to hide his concern. He was worried that something was going to go wrong, that Coulson would change his mind or aliens would attack or worst of all, that Loki would come back and spoil everything, would take Clint away or stab Coulson once more. Those fears preyed on his mind at his worst moments, but he refused to let them win. He carried on getting ready for the big day, and tried to smile.

He never thought that it would actually happen, so when the day of the wedding arrived and the world was still as calm and peaceful as it ever was if you were a member of the Avengers, Clint was almost shocked. He wasn't afraid though. He wanted this, and he knew it was finally happening. He laid awake, watching Coulson who was still asleep, and smiling to himself.

As Coulson's eyes slowly opened and he looked up at him, Clint grinned.

"Hey..."

"Hey yourself..." Coulson moved to sitting, leaning over and kissing Clint gently. "You know what day it is?"

Clint nodded wordlessly, and Coulson smiled before speaking.

"The day you make me the luckiest man in the world... how are you feeling?"

"Excited. Happy. But..." Clint hesitated, then shrugged. "I want this, but... I know you'd stay anyway. So I'm not... it doesn't worry me."

"Good." Coulson squeezed Clint's hand and smiled. "I don't want you to be worried. I want this to be a good day for you."

Clint nodded, getting up and going to shower, taking deep breaths to calm his nerves. It didn't worry him, and he was excited about it, but he was also quite afraid of something going wrong. He wasn't sure what would go wrong. There was still the fear of Loki, and it was twinned with a niggling thought at the back of his head that maybe Coulson would realise the truth, that he would come to work out that Clint was actually not as good as he deserved. He doubted that would happen, but he still feared it.

But he watched as Coulson put on his suit, then came over to Clint and did up his bow tie, and there was no hesitance there, no sign of second thoughts. Clint kissed him gently and squeezed his hand.

"You ready?"

"I'm ready." Coulson answered, and there was such certainty in his eyes that Clint felt stronger than he ever had before.

They made their way to the building that they had chosen - a small registry office near the SHIELD Head Quarters. It wasn't anything special, but it was somewhere they walked past most days, and that made it special to them. It was out of the spotlight, relaxed and casual with their friends there, and there would have been no huge celebration but Tony had demanded to be allowed to organise the after party. Parties aside, it was a small event, but that was what they both wanted. This was personal.

Throughout the ceremony, Clint couldn't take his eyes off of Coulson. He had always known his handler turned boyfriend turned husband was handsome, but today it was like seeing him for the first time. He could hardly believe that he had got this lucky, that he had managed to have this wonderful man for himself. He barely heard the words, so caught up was he in Coulson's gaze. Coulson had to poke him to remind him that it was time to focus. He slipped a ring onto Coulson's hand, and allowed Coulson to do the same – he would move it onto the necklace later.

"Do you, Phillip James Coulson take Clint Francis Barton as your lawfully wedded husband?"

"I do."

"And do you, Clint Francis Barton take Philip James Coulson as your lawfully wedded husband?"

Clint's mouth felt dry. He was glad they had gone with traditional vows, he never could have

managed to say anything more complicated. He nodded, licking his lips and stuttering out “I do.”

"I now pronounce you legally wed, united in love to the end of your days."

Clint's world faded slightly as he was pulled close to Coulson and kissed softly. He returned the kiss, holding tightly to the man in his arms, as though he would never let him go. He broke away, and was shocked by the volume of noise that he had been deaf to before, the sheer joy of his friends.

The party passed him in a blur, and he was reluctant to let go of Coulson's hand, almost worried that if he let go for a moment it would all prove to be a dream.

That evening, they headed off to Rome on their honeymoon, to spend a week relaxing in each other's arms and wandering around the city. They were there for a day before a call came through for a mission.

Coulson seemed a little disappointed, but Clint didn't mind. This was just how their life went. Right now, as long as he had Coulson and his team by his side, Clint felt he could face anything.

Chapter 28: Hot Tub

Chapter Summary

Stark has decided they're having a hot tub party.

Chapter Notes

For the prompt: something ridiculous

There were some things that happened in Coulson's life which the agent was willing to accept as an expected part of the path he had chosen. These included the occasional attack by ancient gods, aliens loose in New Mexico or mild mannered scientists rampaging through the middle of Harlem. However, there were also some things that he was not willing to put up with without protest, or at least not without confusion.

The violent battle against giant slugs fell under the first category. It had been unpleasant, but he was willing to understand that these things happened now, and the team had done well in resolving the threat. The aftermath of Clint hitting one of the monsters with an explosive arrow had been pretty horrific, with goo everywhere, but again, he could tolerate that.

But the fact that Tony's first response after getting to the tower was to look at the team - all covered in goo, with even Natasha slightly splattered in it - and suggest that they showered and then had a hot tub party, well, that was definitely the second.

"That includes you Agent. And Clint Agent."

"My surname is still Barton." Clint protested, crossing his arms. "And even if it wasn't, it would be Clint Coulson not Clint Agent. Agent's his first name."

Coulson frowned at that slightly.

"My first name is Phil."

"Of course it is Agent." Clint and Tony replied in unison, and Phil had to resist the urge to slam his head against something hard.

That seemed to settle the discussion though, and Clint took Coulson's hand, leading him off to shower. Coulson tried to tell himself that it couldn't be that terrible. It would be alright, he was used to the team. And this was meant to be fun. But his stomach was filled with a kind of dread - not total, he knew no one's life was in danger, that this was meant to be relaxing. Just a vague sense of concern. He helped Clint to wash off the worst of the goo.

"Barton..." He tried to sound strict, but he couldn't keep the amusement from his voice. "Care

to explain to me how you managed to get snail goo behind your ear?"

"Practice and skill sir."

Coulson carefully washed it away, then leaned in to kiss the soft skin, breathing against it.

"There..."

"Thanks. Come on. Hot tub."

Coulson didn't bother trying to protest as Clint pulled on a pair of black swimming trunks with white arrows scattered across them. Clint had apparently decided this was what they were doing, and he did not have the heart to deny his husband what he wanted right now. Even when Clint threw a rather embarrassing pair of swim shorts, navy blue and with Cap's shield as a repeating pattern down the side, he didn't protest, just pulled them on.

If Coulson had been honest with himself, he might have had to admit that part of his reason for not protesting was that Stark's hot tub was rather impressive. It was on the rooftop, with a supply of champagne and a beautiful view over the city. It had clearly been designed for Stark's parties, and so Coulson hoped it had been thoroughly disinfected since its previous use. But the tub was beyond large, and Natasha was already lounging in it wearing a simple black swimming costume. She was relaxing with friends, and clearly felt no need to dress up.

"Nice shorts sir."

"Thanks..." he sunk into the warm water, letting out a groan of relief as he settled into the depths. Clint dived in shallowly, before curling up at his side, stretching a little. He wrapped an arm around his waist, and waited for the rest of the team. He did not have long to wait. Steve appeared, wearing the same shorts as Coulson himself and obviously slightly embarrassed at them, whilst Tony was wearing Iron Man speedos. There were some things that Coulson knew he was happier not querying. But Stark Industries merchandising department clearly had a new range.

"Hey, Tony..." Clint called out as he looked up at him. "Did you organise a hot tub party just to show off your new swimwear?"

"As if I would do something like that..." Tony answered with a grin. Clint groaned, and splashed at him with some water. Tony jumped in and splashed Clint as well, making Coulson shuffle rapidly to the side.

He was a little surprised when he realised that Bruce was in the pool, having not seen him approach, but as he moved to sit next to Natasha, he began to realise why he might be picking up rather impressive sneaking skills. She rested her head on his shoulder, and they watched the way Clint and Tony were splashing each other. Coulson moved over to join them. If Steve wanted to be responsible and stop them he could, but for now they were just going to take refuge where they could.

Steve stepped closer to intervene, got hit by a face full of water and retreated to the rest. At least Clint seemed to be enjoying himself. Coulson tried to focus on that, rather than worry about how this had become his life.

He looked up as he saw something approaching the rooftop, a spike of adrenaline hitting before he remembered that there was only one person missing, and that they were likely to turn up to the tower in this way. He looked up, and smiled at Thor, a little surprised when he realised Thor was not flying alone.

Held to his chest, and bundled in his cape, was Jane. The god kissed her softly before setting her down, and she waved shyly at the group, a little hesitant. She was wearing a costume with rainbow stripes, which would have been unusual if not for the fact that Coulson suspected she had borrowed Darcy's. Natasha beckoned her over, and she climbed in. Thor looked at them all.

"Should I undress?"

"You need shorts big guy." Tony answered, and he reached behind him, picking up a pair of the iron man speedos and throwing them at Thor.

Coulson averted his eyes as Thor got changed, and when he climbed into the water he splashed Clint and Tony so hard that both of them retreated.

"Are we playing?" The god asked almost quietly.

"Yeh. Just...try not to drown anyone." Clint answered with a grin, not wanting to see Thor upset. And then Clint launched himself forwards to play, and Coulson just settled back to watch.

Chapter 29: Anniversary

Chapter Summary

It's the first anniversary of New York, and the team think of how far they have come.

It was strange how things could change in a year. They counted the passing of time, and with it their own anniversaries, their own memories and histories. A few weeks back, it had been a year since Loki had taken Clint, had corrupted his mind and his heart, turned his body against those Clint trusted most. Clint still felt ill at the memory of it, still had nightmares where he woke frozen at the thought of that icy touch, that gaze that had pierced into his soul.

What had changed though was that when Clint woke from the nightmares, he woke somewhere he could class as a home, and with his husband by his side. He wasn't alone any more. He wasn't sure what was going to happen in the future, but that was alright. People didn't know what would happen, but they still carried on, they still did well. It had been a year, and somehow their fragile team had survived.

He couldn't believe that, but it had happened. They'd grown close, and it felt for the first time like he had a family. A family was something that he could certainly get used to.

But today wasn't the anniversary of his being taken, of the nightmares that rocked him and led to him waking frozen in Phil's grasp. Today was the anniversary of something else, something different, and something better. Today, it was a year after the battle. A year after a date which had involved a lot of loss, a lot of pain, but had led to survival. For Clint, it was the day he had got his body back, his mind back, and the day that he had lost Coulson. It would be a few more weeks before the anniversary of Coulson's return.

Today was a day for remembering, for mourning, and for celebrating. Victory had been gained, but it had come at a price. Clint and Coulson stood side by side at the memorial service, their team at around them, and Clint thought of the lives that had been lost and the part he had unwillingly played in their destruction. He had done what he could and it had not been enough. But with these people, it had been. It wasn't an end to the fighting, but it had been a victory, a success, and as he watched the people brought together, as he looked out at the city that had been rebuilt, he knew that he had done well.

By the end of the ceremonies, every one of the team was exhausted. Still they stood proud, staying close to each other, and when they headed home they were ready to fight again, to carry on doing what it was that they believed in because they had to, because there was no one else, and because it was what they had to do. Because it was the right thing.

Clint told himself that as he flopped down on one of the sofas in the communal space, his eyes closed, and just let himself breathe for a little while. Around him he could hear his team

mates doing the same, aside from Steve who was making everyone a cup of tea. He supposed that made sense. He'd heard something about people making tea in the war. The Second World War, the one that Steve had been caught up in. When a cup was pushed into his hands, he took it, sipping it.

The sweet taste was almost overpowering but it was grounding in a way, and he thought that the people making sweet tea probably knew what they were doing. He sipped it slowly until the cup was empty, and then he set it down, leaning back against Coulson and running his fingers over the back of the robotic kitten that Tony had decided would make a good birthday present. Sometimes Tony had good ideas.

"Hey..." He murmured, almost asleep. It had been a long ceremony.

"Hey yourself..." Coulson's lips brushed his forehead and he relaxed. No matter what happened, they had made it this far.

"We did it."

"We did." Coulson answered, an arm slipping around Clint's shoulder. They sat quietly, listening to the noises of their family around them, disturbed only when Tony looked up from his phone.

"We should have shawarma again."

Clint started to laugh at that, and around him the others were smiling to themselves. Steve stood up, glancing hesitantly at the door before making up his mind. Sometimes it was easy to see the frightened but brave man he had been before the serum.

"I've got something for you all." He informed them, then left. Tony shrugged and pulled a face, making it clear he had no idea what was happening, and they sat there quietly until Steve returned.

He was carrying a bag which he placed down by his feet, looking at the rest of the team and smiling.

"I...did these..." He reached in, and pulled out framed paintings – seven of them in total, each showing the entire team including Coulson. They were all in casual clothes, different outfits for each painting, and in each a different person was at the centre of the frame. "I... wanted everyone to have a reminder of the fact we're a team. That we're a family."

"You used the outfits we were wearing on our birthday." Bruce noticed with a shy smile, and Steve grinned at him.

"Yes... I thought it might be nice..." He handed them out, beaming at the look in everyone's eyes. Clint was the last to get his, and when he looked at the frame, he felt his heart melt. His necklace was clearly visible and he had the robotic kitten on his lap. He stroked his fingers over the image gently.

"Thanks Steve."

"It's alright Clint..."

He turned to look at Coulson's own, and had to stifle a smile when he noticed that the trading cards had been painted in the background of the image. Natasha made a grab for his, and he relinquished it to her.

The next fifteen minutes were lost in comparing the images, cooing over what they had, and then it was time to eat. They were still tired, but the mood had shifted. They were still

remembering the fight, but this time they were looking at it as what had brought them together as a team. Clint slipped his hand into Coulson's and kissed him gently. He had a home.

Chapter 30: A year from the start.

Chapter Summary

It had been a year since Coulson had opened his eyes in that hospital bed, completely lost and utterly out of place, and found that he was not alone. Clint and he celebrate their time together.

Chapter Notes

Thank you for reading this fic, I hope you enjoyed it! I had a great time writing it.

It had been a year since Coulson had opened his eyes in that hospital bed, completely lost and utterly out of place, and found that he was not alone. In that year, he and Clint had finally admitted to each other the truth of their feelings, and had moved to accept the relationship that both of them had wanted. Today was a special day.

He woke to find Clint limpeted to his side, still deep in sleep but seemingly determined to never let go. Coulson smiled, and wrapped his arms tightly around the sleeping archer, just watching the relaxed look on Clint's face. Tonight, there hadn't been any nightmares, and that was a good sign. It wasn't an end and more nightmares would come, but for tonight they were free of them, and he could be grateful for it.

Clint blinked awake, and kissed him softly.

"Happy anniversary sir."

"Happy anniversary agent..." Coulson answered, running his fingers through Clint's short hair, ruffling it affectionately. He showered gentle kisses over his face. "Come on, time to get up."

"Do we have to go and save the world today?"

"No. Hopefully not. But you've got a pile of paperwork you need to fill in..."

Clint groaned, and Coulson waited just a moment before he smirked.

"But that can wait. Today, I thought we could go for a walk in the park, go out for lunch, and the team want to have a meal this evening and Tony mentioned something about a 'congratulations for living for a year and not dying' party, so that'll be later."

Clint nodded, looking a little hesitant, stretching and gazing up at him.

"What about the afternoon?"

"What would you like to do?"

Clint's lips twisted into a smirk, but there was the slightest hint of concern in the back of his

gaze.

"Oh, I have a few ideas." He answered, wrapping his fingers around Coulson's own. "But you'll have to wait and see."

The shower ended up taking quite a lot longer than either of them had intended, but neither of them objected. They wandered down to breakfast to find Steve already there, cooking.

"Here..." The soldier held out two plates of food. "I'm happy to make more, you eat these. Tony's still asleep, he'll be grateful for the extra rest."

"Thanks." Clint took the plates, and sat at the table with Coulson, eating his own and then starting to try and steal slices of sausage from Coulson's plate. Coulson smiled at him, and flicked a piece onto his plate indulgently.

Clint grinned up at him as he ate, and any concern he was having seemed to fade as he went with him to walk through the park, looking at the civilians living out their lives under the shadow of Stark Tower, knowing that they were safe and that there were heroes out there. It was a lot of responsibility being one of those heroes, but it was worth it if it meant other people could live easily. At least that was how Coulson felt about the whole matter, and judging by Clint's expression he felt the same.

Lunch for the two of them was at a little cafe near the park, somewhere they had eaten even when their relationship had been strictly professional. That thought made Coulson stop for a moment. Even when they were just working together, Clint had never been professional, and Coulson had liked it that way. Clint was Clint, something exceptional and aggravating and unique, and he was grateful to be able to spend time with him.

He watched as Clint devoured his food, and ate his own with a little more grace. Clint was full of nervous energy, practically bouncing in his seat, and Coulson waited patiently to discover the reasoning behind it.

"You seem...energetic?"

"I'm just happy. Come on, hurry up, time to finish eating."

Coulson rolled his eyes, but finished his meal, paid, and took Clint's hand, leading him from the cafe and towards home. The entire walk, Clint kept glancing up at him and squeezing his hand. Coulson returned the squeezes, curious as to what it was that had Clint so riled up.

"Where do you want to go?" He asked, even if he thought he knew the answer.

"Bedroom."

"Thought so. Clint, you're practically jumping. Did you get coffee again?"

"No..." Clint answered after a moment's hesitation. "Just love you." He lent up and kissed Coulson, wrapping his arms and legs around him as they made their way into the elevator.

Coulson half-dragged, half-carried Clint into their room, and followed him to the bed.

"What is it? You've been a bundle of nervous energy all day." He asked, looking down at Clint who was sat curled up on the corner of their bed, looking up at him with wide eyes. Clint hesitated, then pulled Coulson to sit down beside him, kissing him momentarily, his hand resting on Coulson's tie, wrapping around it.

"I want you."

"I can tell that Clint, what with us being in the bedroom and on the bed."

"I want ...I... I want you to blindfold me."

Clint looked up at him, and Coulson hesitated. He had to admit the idea was tempting, but he knew that losing his sight was the thing that scared Clint most, maybe even more than fear of Loki. This was Clint trying to show that he trusted him, trying to offer him everything, and he wasn't sure how to respond. He leant and brushed his lips over Clint's, buying himself a couple more moments to think, and then he nodded.

"Alright. But you can say stop at any time, and I'll stop. And you can take it off if you want... we'll be gentle, okay?"

Clint shrugged, as though he didn't care, but Coulson could see the way relief washed through him. In a way, it hurt a little that Clint wasn't already expecting that, but he was glad to be able to provide the reassurance Clint needed in this way.

"I love you Clint." He whispered, kissing him more deeply, his hands working at pulling up Clint's t-shirt and throwing it off to the side. A few moments later, Clint's hands were on his shoulders, pulling away the tie which he placed to one side, within reach, and then sliding off the jacket and shirt, running his hands over him.

Coulson slid Clint's jeans down, kissing at his throat, watching for any sign that he was worried. But Clint seemed more relaxed now than he had been earlier. Once they were both naked, he kissed Clint again, and then opened his mouth to ask if he was sure about this. Before he got the chance, the tie was firmly shoved into his hands, and Clint grinned up at him, then firmly closed his eyes.

Coulson fastened the tie over Clint's eyes carefully, pressing kisses against his forehead, and once it was in place he pulled Clint into a tight hug, kissing him.

"Where do you want to go from here Clint?"

In answer, Clint's hand slid down Coulson's body, wrapping around his cock and making his answer quite clear. Coulson laughed a little.

"Alright then..." He gently laid Clint back down on the bed, kissing him and stroking him softly. "I've got you Clint. It's alright. You look incredible..." He kept up the whispered praise, and made sure that one of his hands was on Clint's at all times, giving him something to serve as an anchor, to stop him from feeling lost or afraid. He held onto him, kissing him softly, and only once Clint relaxed did he move to prepare him, never stopping the constant soft reassurance.

He kept everything slow and gentle, even when he was finally within Clint's body, and he kissed him again.

"Thank you." He couldn't think how else to express his gratitude to Clint to showing him this trust, and as he felt Clint clench around him he couldn't hold back a moan, rocking slowly into him and watching the emotions that played over Clint's face.

He reached between them, stroking Clint in time with his movements, nuzzling against his ear and pressing his teeth lightly into the sensitive flesh, earning a louder moan.

"That's it... you're doing so well Clint...so well..." He moaned out, feeling Clint grow tense beneath him before he climaxed, Coulson following a few moments later and pulling Clint into his arms with a kiss, hands going up to remove the blindfold.

Clint blinked up at him, and smirked slightly.

"That was good."

“Yes, it was...” Coulson agreed, pressing a kiss onto his lips. “And I love you so much.”
“I love you too...” Clint admitted, not able to take his eyes off of Coulson now he could see him again.

“If you’ll excuse me Agents Coulson and Barton.” JARVIS’s crisp accent pierced the air.
“I’m sorry to interrupt, but the rest of the team want to see you for dinner.”

Laughing, Clint scurried away to get washed and dressed, and Coulson smiled after him before finding his own clothes.

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